

ABSTRACT

BALCEREK, KATHERINE EMMA. *The Whitney Museum of American Art: Gender, Museum Display, and Modernism.* (Under the direction of David Zonderman).

The Whitney Museum of American Art founded in 1931 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney offers insight into the role of women patrons in the American art world. Furthermore, the Museum's contemporary identification with the Museum of Modern Art obscures its unique history and different founding principles. This paper explores the foundation of the Whitney Museum in roughly the first two decades of its existence from 1931 to 1953 to examine how Whitney and the Museum's first director, Juliana Force, negotiated gender and class ideology and the Modernist discourse to found the first museum solely devoted to American art. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force operated the Whitney Museum based on three main principles: the primacy of the individual artist, the promotion of American art, and the importance of an informal museum space. The Whitney Museum of American Art, staked Whitney and Force's claim in a male dominated art world. The Museum was a complex space, representing a modern feminine viewpoint that embraced inclusivity and elitism, masculine and feminine, Modernism and conservatism. Whitney and Force wanted the Whitney Museum to be less formal and more inclusive, so they designed it like a middle class home with intimate galleries, furniture, carpets, and curtains. However, the decor hindered the Whitney Museum's influence on the modern art canon because critics perceived the Museum as feminine and personal, Modernism's rejection of the feminine and realism that ultimately led to the exclusion of the Whitney Museum's collection of realist art from the modern art historical canon.

The Whitney Museum of American Art: Gender, Museum Display, and Modernism

by
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DEDICATION

For my parents, James and Elizabeth Balcerek, who offered unending support. My Father was always willing to road trip to an archive or museum several states away, and my Mother spent countless hours editing my papers.

BIOGRAPHY

Katherine Emma Balcerek grew up in the Appalachian mountains of North Carolina on a small family farm. She attended Randolph-Macon Woman's College where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in History with a concentration in museum studies. Katherine graduated from Randolph-Macon Woman's College in 2008 magna cum laude. While at North Carolina State University, Katherine participated in the History Graduate Student Association as the Listserv Moderator and presented a paper at the History Graduate Student Conference. Katherine will receive her Master of Arts degree in Public History from North Carolina State University in May 2010.

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INTRODUCTION

The Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City appear to many visitors today as analogous art institutions, presenting modern art in “neutral” white settings and in modern architectural buildings. In fact, the only variation visitors might notice are the museums’ difference in focus with the Museum of Modern Art’s broader coverage contrasting with the Whitney Museum’s interest in American contemporary art. The similarities in buildings, proximity of the museums, and their founding only two years apart conceal the Whitney Museum’s vastly different history, founding principles, and early management. It was not until the 1950’s that these two art institutions came to resemble one another with the Whitney Museum changing its appearance and collecting policy to more fully align with Modernism as represented by the Museum of Modern Art.

To understand why these institutions began so differently yet appear synonymous today, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the actions of its founder, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, and first director, Juliana Force, must be re-examined to fully explore the complexities of the Whitney Museum. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force operated the Whitney Museum based on three main principles: the primacy of the individual artist, the promotion of American art, and the importance of an informal museum space. These principles were influenced by Whitney and Force’s negotiation of gender and class ideology as well as the Modernist discourse. Whitney and Force rejected gendered notions of women’s domestic role to pursue professional careers, yet they accepted the power of domesticity to signify informality and comfort. They rejected upper class elitism in the art

world, represented by the National Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to embrace a democratization of the arts for both young unaccepted artists and the broader public; and yet they used a middle class version of domesticity in their museum design.

Finally, Whitney and Force rejected Modernism's diminution of women's role in culture and the feminine in general, but they accepted the discourse's valuation of self-expression, innovation, and masculinity. Whitney and Force's creation, the Whitney Museum of American Art, staked their claim in a male dominated art world. The Museum became a complex space representing a modern feminine viewpoint that embraced inclusivity and elitism, masculine and feminine, Modernism and conservatism.

This thesis will examine the foundation of the Whitney Museum in the first two decades of its existence from 1931 to 1953. This period in the Museum's life is extremely important as Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force exerted direct control over its management. Whitney died in 1942 and Force in 1948, leaving the Museum in the hands of the board of trustees. It was after Force and Whitney's death that the Museum began transforming itself, moving locations and re-organizing its collections, becoming what is now recognized as one of the pre-eminent museums in New York. Whitney and Force had very strong ideas about museums, artists, and American art; through letters, published articles, speeches, interviews, and museum records and catalogs their views can be deduced. Overall, they promoted an artists first policy, championed an informal museum, and supported American art. These ideas developed with every philanthropic activity they pursued,

including the Whitney Studio (1908-1927), the Whitney Studio Club (1918-1928), the Whitney Studio Galleries (1928-1930), and finally the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Force and Whitney eschewed gender and class ideology that encouraged them to remain within the domestic sphere, finding fulfillment in home and family, to pursue careers in the art world where they founded the first museum devoted to American art. They were determined to challenge the citadels of the American art scene, the National Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in order to create a more inclusive museum--a museum that embraced American art and artists as well as the general public. Whitney and Force wanted the Whitney Museum to be less formal, so they designed the Museum like a middle class American home with intimate galleries, furniture, carpets, and curtains. While these two women ignored or opposed many of the gender dictates of the early twentieth century, they also consciously or subconsciously used the feminine role of decorator to legitimize their entrance into the male art world.

The Whitney Museum blended public and private in its resemblance to an American home, which prompted many critics to label the Museum as feminine and personal. This critical perception undermined the Museum's institutional status, and the Museum's structure conflicted with the Modernist discourse developing in the twentieth century. Yet, Whitney and Force also engaged with Modernism by promoting certain of its key tenets, including self-expression, innovation, and masculinity. They advocated the re-invigoration of art through an infusion of masculinity as opposed to the perceived lifelessness and femininity of Victorian culture; and they encouraged artists' self-expression. However, Whitney and Force

did not relinquish realist art for Modernism's purely abstract art, nor did they accept the complete suppression of the feminine in art. Lois Palken Rudnick suggests that the way women patrons blurred "traditional gender roles was central to their agency and openness, and that it enabled them to embrace a multiplicity of interconnected endeavors."¹ Rudnick's statement also suggests that women patrons could embrace multiple seemingly contradictory viewpoints: the way Whitney and Force were able to incorporate masculine and feminine as well as public and private.

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in many ways is characteristic of women patrons during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; she was very wealthy and from an elite New York family. Gertrude was born in 1875, into the prominent Vanderbilt family. The Vanderbilt fortune resulted from the ingenuity of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, Gertrude's grandfather, a steamboat and railroad man.² In 1896, she married into another wealthy family-the Whitney's. Gertrude began sculpting and collecting art to fulfill her life when her marriage began to disintegrate.³ Gertrude's participation in the art world and foundation of a museum is not unusual for a woman of her class. Since the Civil War, elite men and women formed museums in attempts to define American culture, commemorate

¹ Lois Palken Rudnick, "Modernizing Women: The New Woman and American Modernism," in *American Women Modernists: the Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945*, ed. Marian Wardle (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 166.

² Kathleen McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 216-217.

³ Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1990), 38-39; McCarthy, 217; B.H. Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney* (New York: DoubleDay and Co, 1978), 4-5; Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1905 Diary, Reel 1903, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers 1851-1975, SIAAA.

their own legacy, and assimilate immigrants.⁴ With the Whitney Museum, Gertrude attempted to define American art. Interestingly, she did not follow her class's lead in embracing American art based on classical principles or limit it to a colonial European heritage. Rather, Gertrude embraced the United States as a diverse community, and she encouraged immigrant artists.

Like Gertrude, Juliana Force sought fulfillment outside of women's domestic role; Juliana was from a lower middle class background and worked as a stenographer in New York City before joining Whitney's employ in 1907. Juliana and Gertrude, like other contemporaneous women art patrons had to fight against gender ideology that operated on a belief in separate spheres where men occupied a public world of work and politics, while women were supposed to remain in the domestic realm.⁵ Separate spheres was largely prompted by the home's diminishing productive function. Men left the home to work for pay, locating work in the public sphere, while women stayed at home to keep house; consequently devaluing and isolating domestic labor. However, the home assumed new importance as a refuge from the outside world—a place of solace and rest. Women were viewed as the caretakers of society and a civilizing force, embodying the qualities of purity and unselfishness. Medical ideas buttressed this division, claiming that women were too weak to work and that they must be protected from the harsh realities of the public sphere.

⁴ Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1877-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998).

⁵ For a further discussion of separate spheres ideology, see Rosenberg, *Divided Lives*; Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place a History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); and Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

This ideology gave women a dual personality as morally strong but physically prone to derangement, and it created very specific codes of behavior, restrictive social roles, and gendered professions.

The activity of women in art museums cannot be ignored, if museums are important subjects of study for the knowledge they produce and the values they represent. Although women have occupied a less prominent position in America's major art museums, they have not been absent from the scene. Women in the art world have had different experiences from men based on the economic, social, and ideological implications of perceived sexual difference along with the conditions of race and class. Gender ideology has played a complicated role in both undermining women's position in the art world and bolstering it. This thesis recognizes an approach to gender wherein it is both a set of ideals based on perceived difference between the sexes and a distinct viewpoint of experience. The term feminine appears frequently within this study. As Griselda Pollock indicates “[f]emininity is not the natural condition of female persons. It is a historically variable ideological construction of meanings for a sign W*O*M*A*N....”⁶ Critics used feminine to describe the Whitney Museum, and it became a catchall label for outdated and traditional Victorian culture. Feminine is used here in the way critics of the Museum used it, but it is important to consider Whitney and Force’s perhaps unconscious reconfiguration of this label.

⁶ Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity” in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* ed.s Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 255.

In an adept play on words, scholar Wanda Corn labels women's activities in the art world as "matronage"; she examines the activity of Isabella Stewart Gardner, Jane Stanford, and Alice Pike Barney to explore wider trends in women's cultural leadership.⁷ Corn's essay, "Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America," follows in a significant if not vast literature on women "matrons." Scholarship on women in the art world flourished in the 1970's as feminist historians and art historians sought to recover "lost" or absent women artists, critics, collectors, and museum founders from the historical record.⁸ However, recovery of these women is not enough. Two important works published in the 1980's move beyond recovery and toward analysis: Clare Sherman and Adele Holcomb's work *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820-1979* and Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker's book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*.⁹ These books not only establish the presence of women in art, they also explore how women navigated the art world and were excluded from the historical record and art canon. Pollock and Parker lay out two strategies used by women artists to gain acceptance and work in the male dominated art world: alternative systems and working within the establishment. With alternative strategies women created their own groups, institutions, and networks to be successful; working within the establishment involved

⁷ Wanda Corn, "Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America," 11.

⁸ Linda Nochlin, "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" in *Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, ed.s Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Eleanor Tufts, *Our Hidden Heritage: Five Centuries of Women Artists* (New York: Paddington Press, 1974); Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists, 1550-1950* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976); Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 69, no.3 (September 1987): 326-357.

⁹ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Claire Richter Sherman and Adele M. Holcomb, ed. *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820-1979* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981).

women following existing structures often geared toward men. These strategies are important because they have been used to describe and categorize the activities of women artists as well as women art patrons, most notably by historian Kathleen McCarthy in her seminal work *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930*.

McCarthy terms these two strategies separatist and assimilationist, and she adds a third strategy, individualist, to account for the activities of twentieth century women “matrons.” McCarthy categorizes Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney as an individualist because of her acceptance of female individualism and her renunciation of “a separate ‘women’s culture’.”¹⁰ While McCarthy correctly assesses Whitney’s negotiation of gender ideology, as this thesis will show, Whitney used a separatist strategy to create her own opportunity in the male dominated art world- the Whitney Museum of American Art. Although Whitney did not shun working with male art professionals like some early separatists did, Whitney and Force recognized how Modernism tried to eliminate women from high culture. Thus, they worked to stake their claim in the art world as women. These categories while helpful in understanding women's actions can be problematic, since they over simplify women's actions and significantly obscure the similarities between the three strategies.¹¹ McCarthy fails to

¹⁰ McCarthy, 216.

¹¹ As these categories are problematic, it is tempting to eliminate any classification as oversimplified and obstructing, but these terms do help signify real differences in women's art philanthropy over time. I will not attempt to layout new categories for women's activities in the art world. The focus of this paper on two women and the museum they developed does not allow for generalized classifications.

explore the complexities of the Whitney Museum, ultimately labeling the Museum personal and unique, not recognizing the museum's similarities to other major art institutions..¹²

In much of the literature about the Whitney Museum of American Art and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Juliana Force's role is marginalized. Avis Berman's work *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* offers an exhaustive history of the Whitney Museum and re-asserts Juliana Force's forgotten participation in the Museum's founding and management.¹³ This thesis follows in Berman's scholarship recognizing the importance of Force to the history of the Whitney Museum. However, study of the Whitney Museum must now move beyond biographical recovery to analysis of how Whitney and Force worked together; and the ways they navigated the American art world, creating space, negotiating gender ideals, and expressing their femininity.

Other scholars who investigate the Whitney Museum of American Art are art historians Evelyn Hankins and Janet Wolff. Hankins investigates the Whitney Museum's display style to reveal the way its domestic nature influenced perceptions of the Museum as personal and feminine. Hankins argues these perceptions ultimately undermined the Museum's influence and led art historians and critics to deny the Museum institutional status. Wolff takes into account the way Modernism impacted the Whitney Museum's art collection, arguing this discourse resulted in the devaluation of realist art and its exclusion from the modern art canon. Both scholars explore why the Whitney Museum was considered

¹² McCarthy, 215-244.

¹³ Berman, *Rebels on*.

personal, feminine, and conservative; yet Hankins like earlier critics continues to assert the femininity of the Museum not recognizing the museum's engagement with masculinity and innovation. Here Hankins and Wolff's arguments will be synthesized to examine how Modernism excluded the Whitney Museum based on its domestic display and realist art collection.

The Whitney Museum must be approached like a cultural object, taking from the scholarship of Carol Duncan who suggests museums must be treated like "stage settings" and David Carrier who argues "the museum itself is a total work of art."¹⁴ Museums are historical artifacts expressive of the ideals and beliefs of their time and founders. Interpreting the Whitney Museum as a cultural object allows for analysis of the values it embodied through a combination of its architecture, organization, and collections. It is important to remember that museums are contrived environments where complicated processes of selection and meaning occur. This approach also allows the examination of the complexities of the Whitney Museum and a better understanding of the critic's evolving perceptions of it.¹⁵

This thesis adds a new dimension to the existing scholarship by closely examining the beliefs Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force held about museums, art, and artists.

¹⁴ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1; David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the display of Art in Public Galleries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 6.

¹⁵ Anne Higonnet points out that by looking at the history of museums' display styles a better understanding of visual cultural history maybe achieved, see Anne Higonnet "Private museums, Public Leadership: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Art of Cultural Authority," in *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Matronage and Patronage*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997), 90.

Not only did they express these beliefs in writing, but the Whitney Museum itself through its very structure reveals how Whitney and Force were able to negotiate gender and class ideology and the American art world to support and promote American artists. By placing gender at the center of this analysis, the critical perception of the Whitney Museum as feminine and conservative can be understood. Gender further helps illuminate the way Modernism failed to accommodate Whitney and Force's version of modern. Ultimately, this thesis interjects a new, complex view of the Whitney Museum of American Art; it cannot be labeled solely unique or personal or feminine as both critics and historians have done.

Chapter One: Challenging the 'Family Claim' and Elitism will investigate how Whitney and Force negotiated their position as wealthy women. Both women rebelled against the limited domestic role they were suppose to fulfill; Whitney out of disillusionment with her marriage and Force as a way to escape small town life. By pursuing careers in the art world, Whitney and Force worked within a socially accepted occupation, embracing the cultural connections between women and their supposedly higher sensibilities; but they patronized contemporary art that was scorned by their upper and middle class families. Overall, Whitney and Force's rebellion against gender was also in many ways a class rebellion against elitist strategies in the art world, including the National Academy of Design, juried shows, a formal museum environment, and the exclusion of women artists. Their opposition developed through their long involvement with American art and artists.

Chapter Two: An Informal Museum will argue that Whitney and Force choose to design the Museum like a middle class home, following contemporary interior design

principles, in efforts to make the Museum less formal and the art more approachable. In doing so, Whitney and Force faced critical perceptions of the Whitney Museum as personal, feminine, conservative, and uncritical. These perceptions hindered the Museum's institutional status. Criticism of the Museum can also be mapped chronologically with negative reviews intensifying and occurring more frequently in the late 1930's.

Chapter Three: The Whitney Museum and Modernism argues that Modernism played a key role in undermining the Whitney Museum's institutional status from its inception through the 1980's. Modernism influenced art critics' perception of the Museum: belittling Whitney and Force's patronage, rejecting the Museum's domestic and feminine architectural program, and identifying the Museum's realist art as the antithesis to modern art. Whitney and Force were not merely subjugated by Modernism; rather, they also engaged with this discourse advocating innovation, self-expression, and masculinity, which were central tenets of Modernism. However, Whitney and Force upheld realism and domestic display in opposition to Modernism and in contrast to Modernist art institutions like the Museum of Modern Art. It is consequently ironic that today's Whitney Museum so closely resembles the Museum of Modern Art. Ultimately, Whitney and Force created a complex art museum not wholly feminine or masculine, private or public, conservative or innovative.

CHAPTER ONE

Challenging the 'Family Claim' and Elitism

On an October morning in 1929 Juliana Force made her way uptown to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a bastion of European old masters and classical art. Force had an appointment with Dr. Edward Robinson, director of the museum and a classical archeologist; her mission was to offer Dr. Robinson the collection of American art she had helped Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney amass over the past twenty-two years.¹ The Metropolitan Museum had a long history of excluding nonacademic American art and did not establish an American art department until 1949.² However, despite the Metropolitan's seeming opposition, Whitney and Force had significant reasons to expect the museum's acceptance of their offer. Whitney's family had long supported the Metropolitan Museum with her father serving on the board of trustees; and Juliana Force had worked closely with the curator of painting, Bryson Burroughs, to maneuver several American artists into the Metropolitan's collection.

Whitney authorized Force to offer the Metropolitan a collection of American art estimated at 500 pieces along with five million dollars to construct a new wing for the collection. While the exact language of this meeting is unknown, Juliana Force left angry and insulted, and still in full possession of the collection and the five million dollars.

¹Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1990), 262-264.

² The term nonacademic is used to refer to art produced outside of the membership of the National Academy of Design.

Reportedly, in response to Force's offer, Dr. Robinson said "we don't want any more Americans, we have a cellarful."³ This statement is entirely consistent with Robinson's critical dislike of American art and promotion of the classical canon.⁴

After leaving the Metropolitan Museum, Force went back to Whitney's studio on Eighth Street where Whitney and Forbes Watson, an art critic and close acquaintance, waited for news of the meeting. That afternoon as the three ate lunch the genesis of a museum of American art was born. Watson later wrote that Robinson's refusal may have been Force's intention all along, since she hoped to create a more substantial art institution with the collection and was not interested in being consumed by a museum that little valued American art.⁵ Avis Berman suggests Force was guileful enough to frame her offer to ensure refusal, perhaps not mentioning the financial contribution at all.⁶

For Whitney and Force, the paramount goal was to keep their collection in the public eye. The task had become almost impossible given the number of works they had acquired and the gallery's limited space and function. A museum "seems a perfectly natural evolution," said Whitney, "to me it is the logical continuation of what I have had in my mind

³ Allene Talmey, "Whitney Museum of American Art and the One-Woman Power Behind It-Juliana Force," *Vogue*, I (February 1940).

⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 263. The classical canon refers to art of the Ancient Greeks and Romans or art that borrowed styles, methods, and contents from the art of this period.

⁵ Watson unpublished essay for *Juliana Force and American Art* 1949, Whitney Museum of American Art Papers, Whitney Museum of American Art artists' files and records, 1914-1966, Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., (hereafter cited as SIAAA); Berman, *Rebels on*, 261-264; Talmey, "The Whitney Museum of American Art." Berman suggests that Force had planned for a museum since 1929 with a folder marked "museum" and a letter to Glen O. Coleman expressing this idea

⁶ Berman, *Rebels on*, 264.

for years.”⁷ The foundation of the Whitney Museum of American Art was the culmination of Force and Whitney’s efforts in the art world since the early 1900’s, beginning with the Whitney Studio in 1908. The rejection from the Metropolitan Museum did not hinder the achievement of their ultimate mission: the full acceptance and appreciation of American art that expressed the American scene and the American character. Rather, the rejection validated Whitney and Force’s opinion of the existing American art institutions as out of touch “cemeteries.”⁸ Whitney and Force were determined the museum they created would not replicate this outdated model. Instead they wanted the Whitney Museum of American Art to reflect the life around it and remain “unhampered by official restriction, but with the prestige which a museum invariably carries.”⁹

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force opened the Whitney Museum of American Art on November 17, 1931; thereby, eschewing the predominant gender and class ideology of their time that encouraged them to remain within the domestic sphere, finding fulfillment in home and family. Instead these women pursued careers in the art world where they founded the first museum devoted to American art. Whitney and Force critiqued existing restrictions on women that limited their opportunities, but they were not immune to the gender ideology of their time. Their rebellion against gender and class ideology contributed to their challenge of the citadels of the American art scene, the National

⁷ Ibid., 291.

⁸ Juliana Force, “The Function of the Museum In Our Society,” 25, Microfilm N614 ,Whitney Museum of American Art, Juliana Force Papers, SIAAA.

⁹ Force, “The Function,” 25; Whitney Museum of American Art, *Whitney Museum of American Art: History, Purpose, Activities* Catalog to the Collection (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1937), 4.

Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and, ultimately, influenced Whitney and Force's creation of their own ideals about art museums. These ideals shaped the structure, policy, and decor of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Yet gender ideology worked as a double-edged sword, promoting Whitney and Force's foray into the art world, but coloring the perception of their actions by other art professionals and the media as charity and diminishing their authority.

This first chapter will explore how Whitney and Force negotiated their status as wealthy women. They both sought fulfillment outside of home and family; Whitney out of disillusionment with her marriage and Force as a way to escape small town life. In doing so, they rebelled against their limited role in the domestic sphere, but they also joined numerous other women at this time who sought a college education, careers as writers, teachers, and nurses, and pursued reform as social workers.¹⁰ By pursuing careers in the art world, Whitney and Force worked within a socially accepted occupation, embracing the cultural connections between women and their supposedly higher sensibilities; but they patronized contemporary art that was scorned by their upper and middle class families. Although women's participation in the art world was accepted in many circles, Whitney and Force faced opposition and professional criticism of their patronage and the Whitney Museum. Overall, Whitney and Force's rebellion against gender was also in many ways a class rebellion against elitist strategies in the art world, including the National Academy of Design,

¹⁰ For further discussion of the gendered careers available to women, see Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

juried shows, a formal museum environment, and the exclusion of women artists. Their opposition developed through their long involvement with American art and artists. Whitney and Force's distinctive ideology emphasized an artist-first policy, the unwavering support of American art, and the desire for an informal museum.

Whitney's Entrance into the Art World

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was brought up extremely cosseted, educated by tutors and at the Brearley School for Girls. As an adolescent, Gertrude chafed at her upbringing; she keenly felt the constraints of her position and gender and often wished she had been born a boy.¹¹ In 1896, she married Harry Payne Whitney, who was also from an elite, wealthy family. An avid sportsman, Harry Whitney devoted much of his time to horse racing and polo. At the beginning of the Whitney's marriage they were very much in love, but time and differing interests soon created tension between the couple. Gertrude, looking back on these early years, commented that “[j]ust as physically I had moved some fifty feet from my father's house into my husband's, so I had moved some fifty feet in feeling, environment and period.”¹² Gertrude had expected marriage to radically change her life, giving her purpose, but instead she found herself in remarkably the same place as before.

By 1899, Gertrude felt that Harry had become indifferent to her; he was spending most of his time sporting and pursuing other women. She grew increasingly restless and

¹¹ Berman, *Rebels on*, 38-39; Kathleen McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 217; B.H. Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney* (New York: DoubleDay and Co, 1978), 4-5; Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1905 Diary, Reel 1903, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers 1851-1975, SIAAA.

¹² Friedman, 160.

unhappy with her marriage and family life, which now included two small children: Flora born in July of 1897, and Sonny in February of 1899.¹³ “I couldn’t free myself from certain feelings. I wanted to work. I was not very happy or satisfied in my life. The more I tried to forget myself in my life the less I succeeded in doing so,” wrote Whitney in a retrospective journal from 1912.¹⁴ It is evident that Whitney struggled with her role as wife, mother, and society matron; she felt bound by these gender roles, yet wanted to do more with her life. Like many women of her generation, Whitney had personal ambitions outside of domestic life even though gender ideology considered the private sphere upper and middle class women’s proper place. Women’s historian, Rosalind Rosenberg, suggests most well educated middle and upper class women faced this dilemma as marriage and motherhood seemed a waste of their education.¹⁵ As Berman argues “[s]he



Figure 1.1 Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney with daughter Barbara, 1903. Source: Berman, *Rebels on*, 63.

¹³ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1905 Diary, 3-4, SIAAA.

¹⁴ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1905 Diary, 4, SIAAA.

¹⁵ Rosenberg, 26-27; Berman, *Rebels on*, 47-8. Rosenberg mainly discusses this dilemma in relation to college educated women. Whitney did not attend college, but her education at the Brearley School was rigorous with classes in mathematics, German, French, history, Latin, and Science. Whitney even hoped to attend college, but her parents disapproved of further education, since they felt it would interrupt her social obligations and stall her coming out party.

[Gertrude], who wanted to leave her mark, was relegated to a minor sphere, whereas he [Harry], who had been brought up to lead, only wanted to play games.”¹⁶

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney chafed against the gender ideology that touted “the family claim” and marginalized her from public life.¹⁷ She was supposed to care for her home and children, but as a very wealthy woman she had maids to see to the cleaning and cooking, and nurses to oversee the daily needs of her children. What then was she supposed to do? Follow in the footsteps of her mother and female relatives pursuing social activities? Whitney rejected this course as the central element of her life, finding little satisfaction in the social whirlwind of parties and afternoon visits.¹⁸ As Harry’s infidelities increased, Gertrude more and more resented her woman’s lot. “Men are tyrantsWhile [woman] belongs to him she is a poor thing indeed, with no object to fulfill but the physical one, with no place in life but the lower one, with no dreams or thoughts to express but the baser ones She must be untrammelled and free before all her faculties can work,” wrote Whitney.¹⁹ In other writings, Whitney was even bleaker about her circumstances, which she described as a cage: “I demand why shall the conventional come back, why must I live like what I am not, and I

¹⁶ Berman, *Rebels on*, 52.

¹⁷ See Rosenberg, 3-35. Rosenbeg calls women’s duty to care for home and family “the family claim,” a term she takes from Jane Addams. It is important to remember that gender ideology was not always stable. For instance, in the 1880’s popular opinion emphasized the importance of motherly love and women’s asexual nature, but by the 1920’s motherly love was viewed with suspicion and the “wife-companion” model became popular, which encouraged a healthy sexual relationship between husband and wife along with emphasizing partnership based on friendship. These subtle shifts often impacted women’s lives greatly. Additionally, ideology is prescriptive in nature and not universally accepted by every person in the same way, see Rothman, 4.

¹⁸ However, Whitney still participated in the social life of New York, hosting parties and attending social events.

¹⁹ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1906 Diary, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm 2370, SIAAA; McCarthy, 218.

beat my head against the cage and I weep and I grind my ugly teeth together, for I know that I am not bigger than circumstances and that I am not big enough to put the world aside”²⁰

Limited professional opportunities did exist for educated women. It was socially acceptable by the twentieth century for women to become writers, journalists, nurses, social workers, and librarians.²¹ As social workers and nurses, women were expanding their role as caretakers into the public sphere, and writing was acceptable since it could be done from home. In an unpublished essay about women’s roles, Whitney argued for the training and preparation of young girls for occupations regardless of their class. As she grew older, Whitney more and more viewed home and family as insufficient means of fulfillment for the modern woman.²² Whitney wrote, “the old idea, born of man, to keep the woman down, is a thing of the past, she won’t be kept down, so give her every opportunity of training & sensible understanding to fulfill her own nature.”²³ Whitney advocated female self-expression and actualization: “[they] possess the same longing to be independent, the same desire to express themselves....”²⁴

Whitney considered writing as a career, and she wrote several short stories, plays, and novels throughout her life. However, her writing was always very autobiographical, and she

²⁰ Friedman, 235.

²¹ Rosenberg, 28-29.

²² Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, unpublished essay, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm 1903, SIAAA.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. Whitney also connected women’s greater freedom and independence to the invention of the automobile.

feared the public exposure and press frenzy that might result from pursuing such an occupation.²⁵ Art as an outlet began to attract Whitney more and more after she visited John La Farge's studio in 1898. Whitney began redecorating her house at Two West Fifty-Seventh Street and visited La Farge at the suggestion of her father-in-law, William C. Whitney.²⁶ Although Whitney purchased three works from La Farge, the experience intrigued her more than the art works. She found visiting the sanctum of an artist's studio thrilling. From this event, Whitney began to realize her capacity to collect. "From then on I took an interest in American art," commented Whitney, "I began to realize the opportunity I had of acquiring."²⁷

Whitney had always been interested in art; she had grown up surrounded by it. Whitney's father collected art and served on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Vanderbilt mansions were renowned exemplars of Gilded Age architecture.²⁸ From an early age she began sketching and drawing, which were considered lady-like pursuits; on several trips abroad she visited the Louvre and the Paris Salon, taking extensive notes. Whitney began sculpting in 1900, studying privately with Hendrik Christian Andersen whom she met through artist Howard Cushing, a Newport society member.²⁹ Sculpting offered

²⁵ Berman, *Rebels on*, 53-55.

²⁶ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1905 Diary, 3-4, SIAAA; Friedman, 160. La Farge had designed stained glass windows for William C. Whitney and Gertrude's parents. La Farge was a popular for his stained glass windows; he worked with Louis Comfort Tiffany on the invention of opalescent stained glass.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ McCarthy, 216.

²⁹ Berman, *Rebels on*, 57.

Whitney a way to express herself, an established community of teachers, artists, studios, and models with whom she could expand her world, and a chance to use her hands molding the clay. The physicality of sculpting appealed to Whitney as way to defy family and social expectations, since sculpting necessitated getting dirty, doing rigorous physical activity, and studying the human body. There still existed a certain amount of uneasiness with women studying nude models.³⁰

By 1902, Whitney's artistic ambitions were stifled by several life events. First, Harry's infidelities intensified in a relationship with a distant cousin by marriage who Gertrude was forced to confront regularly, since they moved in the same social set. Secondly, Gertrude became pregnant with her third child, Barbara, who was born in March of 1903.³¹ These circumstances sent Whitney into a depression that lasted several months. Whitney even believed she was on the verge of death, and she wrote a farewell letter to Harry, but it was never delivered.³² Whitney hoped a trip abroad would cure her, and in August of 1903 she, Harry, Flora, and Sonny set sail for England. By late fall Whitney regained some of her previous energy and motivation. She began to study sculpture under James Earle Fraser, who was a popular sculptor famous for his design of the Buffalo and Indian Head nickel and the equestrian statue of Theodore Roosevelt.³³ Whitney then opened her first studio in Manhattan and began to take classes at the Art Students League. At the

³⁰ Berman, *Rebels on*, 54-55.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

³² Friedman, 203-208.

³³ Berman, *Rebels on*, 61.

League she met a variety of new people and saw the obstacles faced by American artists: especially the lack of exhibition venues, and the assumption that they were inferior to European artists.³⁴ However, Whitney felt changed, “I have become hard inside,” wrote Whitney, “and that hardness is spreading so that now only a little softness covers it which is the inside”³⁵

This bleak period from of Whitney’s life transformed her in multiple ways. Not only did she harden to the realities of her marriage, but as she recovered, Whitney became determined to create her own life apart from the duties of wife and mother. A life where she could find happiness, love, identity, and pursue freedom as an artist. Whitney’s move away from her family was difficult, as evidenced by journal entries from this period. Whitney questioned herself in her journal, “he [Harry] has his interests in life apart from you, why not have yours apart from him? But would not the following of such goals take you further in spirit from him and your home life every day? The immediate is what holds me now so that it is hard to see the ultimate. Now I need an outlet, an unbottling. I am stifled, I am suffocated”³⁶ Whitney agonized over what it meant to pursue aims outside of the domestic sphere, but she realized that her quest for self-identity would fulfill her life in a new way and help ease her depression. Whitney was also still concerned with her husband’s view of her and she hoped her self-improvement would make her more attractive to him.³⁷

³⁴ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1904 Diary, 34, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm 1903, SIAAA.

³⁵ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1904 Diary, 34-35, SIAAA; Friedman, 222.

³⁶ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1904 Diary, 36, SIAAA.

³⁷ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1905 Diary, 38, SIAAA.

As part of Whitney's transformation, she began to compartmentalize her life, setting up distinct sections where she devoted time and energy but never give herself fully. This compartmentalization is evidenced by a list she created in 1904 titled "The Winter's Campaign."³⁸ In the list she outlined activities to pursue for the upcoming months, but the list also reads as five aspects of her life: "First--Work, Second--Make and keep some men friends, Third--Go to a great many concerts, lectures, exhibitions, Fourth--Organize your charity, Fifth--Cultivate a light touch in connection with Harry."³⁹ These aspects of Gertrude's life coalesced by 1906 around three distinct spheres: her studio in New York where she pursued art and sculpting; her trips to Paris where she felt truly alive to pursue art and society; and finally her mansion at Two West Fifty Seventh Street where she carried out her duties of wife and mother.⁴⁰

This period in Whitney's life refocused her attention on art and made her recognize the power her wealth gave her to pursue anything she wanted. Whitney came to view her social position and money as "talents" to be used in achievement of her artistic goals.⁴¹ Whitney even began a new journal in 1906 titled *Artistic Possibilities* in which she worked out ideas about art and patronage. Since 1904, Whitney had considered the idea of a society for artists that worked as a school, gallery, and exhibition space; this idea continued to grow

³⁸ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1904 Diary, 32-33, SIAAA; Friedman, 222.

³⁹ Friedman, 222.

⁴⁰ Berman, *Rebels on*, 75.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

although the school aspect dimmed.⁴² Increasingly, in Whitney's journals, she urged herself to help others in a way that would improve her life; she committed herself to art patronage and considered it part of her creative expression.⁴³ "In more ways than anyone can guess, American art is indebted to the philandering of Harry Payne Whitney," Berman argues.⁴⁴ However, it was Whitney's resilience, determination, and rebellion against gender and class ideology that earned American art a champion.

Even as Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney became more invested in art, opening a studio and pursuing training, she was always conscious of her family's opinion about her art career--even using a pseudonym until 1910. Their disapproval resulted from Whitney's interaction with artists from lower backgrounds, and her family objected to the energy it took away from her domestic duties. Upper and middle class women, especially married ones, were discouraged from working outside of the home as it undermined the notion of the male breadwinner and caused women to neglect their primary duty of caring for the family.⁴⁵ Alice Vanderbilt, Gertrude's mother, reprimanded her to take greater care of her children "do not let him [Sonny] get ill like last year. Keep him warm and leave the Statue--what is anything compared with the health of those we love!" wrote Alice to Gertrude in 1900.⁴⁶

⁴² Friedman, 213-214.

⁴³ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1904 Diary, 24, SIAAA.

⁴⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 53.

⁴⁵ See Rosenberg, 3-35.

⁴⁶ Berman, *Rebels on*, 60.

Although Whitney's family initially objected to her sculpting career, society at large accepted women artists, collectors, and patrons. As Pollock and Parker point out in *Women, Art, and Ideology*, women have experienced a long, often constrained relationship with the arts. Gender ideologies of different periods have alternately encouraged women in the arts or excluded them. Art became an acceptable arena for women by the end of the nineteenth century due to the connection between art's idealistic goal of moral uplift and women's role in society as moral guides and caretakers. Gilded Age Americans placed significant emphasis on art's ability to transmit values and morally refine the viewer; this view continued into the 1920's. Furthermore, art historian Mary D. Garrard argues that art is linked with femininity because they are accorded similar status and given similar qualities. Garrard suggests both women and art are assigned a fringe status, "[I]ike women, the arts are simultaneously cherished for their purifying, uplifting value even as they are regarded as frivolous and a luxury in the larger social scheme."⁴⁷ In the Gilded Age, art occupied the realm of high culture, which like white, middle-class womanhood was supposed to exist outside of the market in "a terrain of refinement and beauty."⁴⁸

These connections helped women become artists in unprecedented numbers beginning in the 1870's; they joined art schools, submitted works to salons, and competed for sales. By 1890 women comprised 48.1 percent of all artists, when in 1870 they had only

⁴⁷ Mary D. Garrard, "'Of Men, Women and Art': Some Historical Reflections," *Art Journal* 35 no. 4 (1976), 325.

⁴⁸ Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 6.

made up 10 percent.⁴⁹ After the Civil War, American art schools professionalized and became the central institution for art training, which changed the perception of artists as innate geniuses.⁵⁰ This shift allowed women to fight for admittance into these schools and, thus, gain credibility as professional artists.

Sculpting presented its own unique set of physical and “moral” challenges for women artists, as previously discussed; but its purpose in crafting public monuments reinforced the connection between women’s civilizing role and art’s elevating goal. Most sculpture at this time was intended for public spaces, such as a park, library, or courthouse and memorialized a historical figure or promoted a lofty ideal. The nature of the commissioned sculpture was, consequently, dictated by its purpose, which left little room for personal biography. Commissioned work allowed Whitney to maintain a distance from her subject matter that she could not have achieved with a writing career.

Whitney primarily worked from commissions throughout her career, receiving her first in 1903 for five bas-relief panels for the home of her cousins Lila and William Field through the architect William Adams Delano who later designed Whitney’s studio in Westbury.⁵¹ Whitney became a very talented and well respected sculptor albeit conservative in style, maintaining a romantic symbolism in much of her work. She was greatly influenced by Auguste Rodin and Daniel Chester French who adhered to academic principles in style

⁴⁹ Swinth, 3-4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13-15.

⁵¹ Friedman, 209, 273.

and content. “It was the act of sculpting and the surprises it would bring into her life that constituted this woman’s daring. The lack of emancipation in the art she produced was ultimately secondary to the fact that she had taken the initiative of producing it at all,” argues Berman.⁵²

The Titanic Memorial in Washington, D.C. perhaps best illustrates Whitney’s romantic style. The work shows a young nude male swathed in drapery hiding the appropriate parts. Positioned in a cruciform stance with outstretched arms, the figure represents the sacrifice of the passengers. Many saw the sculpture as the perfect symbol of grief, while others debated the appropriate age of the male figure.⁵³ In a letter to Andrew O’Connor, Whitney wrote “everyone wants ten dreary years added to his life...I can’t do it-- poor darling he gave up so much more being a kid!”⁵⁴ Whitney received multiple commissions throughout her career, including the Daughters of the American Revolution Memorial, the memorial to the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I, and the Buffalo Bill statue in Cody, Wyoming.

In 1907, Gertrude moved her studio in Manhattan to Greenwich Village where she could be closer to James Earle Fraser, and other sculptors like Daniel Chester French and Andrew O’Connor whom she had met through Fraser.⁵⁵ Establishing a studio in Greenwich

⁵²Berman, *Rebels on*, 56.

⁵³ Nathan Straus to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, January 19, 1914, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm 1903, SIAAA; Friedman, 334.

⁵⁴ Friedman, 341.

⁵⁵Gerald W. McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York city Neighborhood, 1898-1918* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2001), 177.

Village was a clear statement of Gertrude's independence and determination to pursue art as a career. It not only removed her further from her family circle, but also distanced her from other social acquaintances who regularly dropped by her Manhattan studio. The Greenwich Village studio encouraged Gertrude to socialize with a wider sphere of people, including other artists, and it also provided the opportunity for a steady succession of love affairs. Gertrude tended to have relationships with male artists or those modeling for her sculptures. Predominately, Gertrude exerted control over these romantic affairs, deciding how the relationship would proceed and usually being the one to terminate the affair.⁵⁶ The studio in Greenwich Village represents more than just Gertrude's independence, but also her quest for self-identity and fulfillment. "I suddenly feel that I have power and I know that I am going to use it. I suddenly know that I am and that no one can change that. I have suffered and I have received much...and perhaps because of something I know nothing of now I am a person."⁵⁷ For Gertrude having her own goals and purpose not only gave her fulfillment but validated her very existence: "I suddenly know that I am," wrote Gertrude.

Greenwich Village at this time was a somewhat isolated neighborhood with several immigrant enclaves, primarily Italian and Irish.⁵⁸ By 1860 the Italian community predominated in the southern part of the village from Canal Street to Houston Street and

⁵⁶ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney to William Stackpole, 1910, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm 1903, SIAAA. Berman argues that Whitney's affairs often stemmed from her support of their art work, then a friendship would develop and later intimacy; however, when these men inevitably tried to dominate the relationship or became too close Whitney would discard or ignore them. These affairs became a routine part of Whitney's compartmentalization of her life, see Berman, *Rebels on*, 86.

⁵⁷ Friedman, 248; Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1905 Diary, SIAAA.

⁵⁸ McFarland, 11-12.

remained a prominent group within the Village, while the north side of Washington Square consisted of middle to upper class Protestant families whose influence faded into the twentieth century.⁵⁹ Historian Gerald McFarland argues that it was not until the 1910's that Greenwich Village became known as a bohemian, artistic district.⁶⁰ The village began to attract more artists during this period due to the low rents, inexpensive restaurants, an eclectic mix of people, and an existing artists colony begun in the 1880's. William Glackens, Evertt Shinn, Ernest Lawson, and John Sloan were just some of the artists who lived or maintained studios in Greenwich Village; Whitney became familiar with these artists through their membership in the Ashcan School. Whitney's studio consisted of a large, open space with high ceilings and wooden floors and a sitting room hung in red velvet.⁶¹ The studio was located at 19 MacDougal Alley, a narrow block long street behind the mansions on Washington Square.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., 77-78.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 189-190. McFarland suggests bohemian was defined as a social type that opposed bourgeois values and the acquisition of money. It was marked by unconventional behavior, informality, and a free spirit. Writing, poetry, painting, and sculpting were identified as bohemian occupations, and there was a general affection for European culture.

⁶¹ Berman, *Rebels on*, 76.

⁶² McFarland, 63. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was already connected to Greenwich Village through her participation on the board of managers for Greenwich House, a settlement house founded by Mary Simkhovitch on Jones Street. Greenwich House offered classes in cooking, dancing, and academic courses; it also provided a kindergarten, kept a reading room, gave out hot lunches, and performed extensive surveys of the working class. Whitney taught children's art classes at the settlement as well as being part of the board. In the Progressive era, women began actively engaging in philanthropic activities as part of extending their ideological roles as caregivers into the public sphere. Settlement houses were a popular way for middle and upper class men and women to reach working class neighborhoods; perhaps, the most famous was Hull House founded by Jane Addams in Chicago.

After 1907, Whitney more actively patronized artists and collected art. She organized an art exhibition at the Colony Club, which was an exclusive women's club in New York City founded in 1903. Whitney was a charter member, and the Club provided a space for women in the city equivalent to men's clubs where women could gather, attend lectures, and smoke and drink.⁶³ Whitney's exhibition was part of the opening of the Colony Club's new building, and it included academic painters like John Singer Sargent, Paul Dougherty, and James Abbott McNeil Whistler as well as more avant-garde artists like Ernest Lawson, Robert Henri, and Arthur B. Davies. Whitney's inclusion of these artists signaled her growing interest in modern art; yet her choice of society artists, Sargent and Whistler, and a collection of lace, demonstrated Whitney's still undetermined aesthetic.

Juliana Force joined Gertrude's employ during this period to help her organize the Colony Club exhibition. Juliana had been working for Gertrude's sister-in-law, Helen Hay Whitney, as her social secretary and had helped Helen with her third book.⁶⁴ Juliana was a logical choice, since she was already familiar with the social register and the Colony Club. Born in December of 1876 in Doylestown, Pennsylvania to Max and Julia Rieser, Juliana was a lively,



Figure 1.2 Juliana Force ca. 1940-1941. Source: Berman, *Rebels*

⁶³ Berman, *Rebels on*, 82

⁶⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 84-5.

confident, outspoken, and gregarious woman.⁶⁵ Growing up in Hoboken, New Jersey where her parents moved in 1886, Juliana was determined to escape her lower middle class background and the household drudgery her female relatives endured everyday. To attain these goals Juliana attended Northfield Seminary for Young Ladies, a respectable feeder school to Wellesley and Mount Holyoke Colleges, and then taught at Eagan's Business School in Hoboken.⁶⁶ In 1906, bored with Hoboken and giving up on her dream of writing for a career, Juliana set herself up as a freelance typist and stenographer in Manhattan.

Force and Whitney quickly developed a close relationship. To Whitney, Force represented a self-made, professional woman- an embodiment of the New Woman. Whitney was very taken with the ideal of the New Woman as an independent, assertive female who participated in the workforce and the competition it involved; this was the type of woman Whitney imagined becoming.⁶⁷ For Force, Whitney provided access to the upper levels of society, while also giving Force a job that was stimulating. Whitney and Force were both nonconformists, rebelling against gender and class dictates. Neither wanted to limit their lives to the traditional role of wife and mother nor be dictated to by Victorian morality. Force pursued an affair with a married man for eight years before marrying him when she was

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 30-33.

⁶⁷ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, unpublished essay, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm 1903, SIAAA. Berman, *Rebels on*, 85; Rosenberg, 25. For a discussion on the New Woman, see Dorothy Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 16-17. Rosenberg suggests the New Woman in the twentieth century was energetic, well educated, affluent, and independent. Freed from household chores by technology and increasing wealth she was able to pursue leisure activities, join clubs, perform charity work, and even pursue a career. Schneider suggests that the New Woman represented a woman who was determined to conduct herself as she wanted, pursuing self fulfillment and independence whether through physical activity or moving in the world unchaperoned.

thirty-five, which was considered almost irreversible spinsterhood.⁶⁸ As Whitney's personal secretary, Force helped Whitney plan exhibits, negotiate sculpture commissions, and patronize artists. Even though Force knew very little about art, she was a quick learner and enjoyed socializing with artists, who provided her with a real world education. Sunday mornings at Force's apartment became regular social events with artists dropping by to discuss galleries, exhibits, paintings, and each other.⁶⁹

Whitney and American Art

Whitney became interested in more avant-garde styles shortly after meeting Robert Henri in 1906 on a trip to Aiken, South Carolina.⁷⁰ Henri was painting a portrait for Mrs. George Sheffield whose estate was located near the Whitney farm. Whitney was fascinated by Henri's charisma and outspoken opposition to the National Academy of Design. Even though Henri was a member, he rejected the tightly controlled exhibitions held by the Academy that excluded non-members and new styles. The National Academy of Design, founded in 1826, was an artist run group that upheld artistic standards derived from Europe while still stimulating the arts in America.⁷¹ The Academy held large annual juried exhibitions, awarded prizes, and favored traditional history paintings or art with a moral

⁶⁸ Berman, *Rebels on*, 87-96. Juliana Rieser married Dr. Willard Burdette Force on June 20, 1912. Juliana and Willard started their affair in 1904, while he was still married.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷¹ Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 220.

lesson.⁷² The Academy left little room for more experimental American artists who, like Henri, painted from contemporary life.

Henri and his followers rejected the conservatism of the National Academy, feeling the art promoted by the Academy was too far removed from life in the United States. Instead they favored realism in art that expressed the lived experience, especially the vitality of urban life.⁷³ Robert Henri emphasized vernacular subject matter and self expression; Henri painted and encouraged his students to paint the urban environment, primarily New York City, in all its grit with all its multitudes of people. Followers of Henri included: John Sloan, Everett Shinn, Anne Bernstein, William Glackens, George Luks, Peggy Bacon, and Ernest Lawson, and this group was later labeled by art historians as the Ashcan School.⁷⁴ The Henri group followed in the tradition of Daumier, Manet, and more recently Thomas Eakins, a prominent realist painter who taught at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where Henri, Sloan, and Glackens attended classes.⁷⁵ Eakins and Henri reflected the growing fear of overt “feminization” of culture; by the turn of the century many Americans began to feel culture had become too pious, neurasthenic, ornate, and sensitive. They rejected Victorian,

⁷² Betsy Fahlman, “The Art Spirit in the Classroom: Educating the Modern Woman Artist,” in *American Women Modernist: the Legacy of Robert Henri 1910-1945*, ed. Marian Wardle (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 104; Berman, *Rebels on*, 68.

⁷³ Marian Wardle, *American Women Modernist*, 4.

⁷⁴ Hughes, 323-335

⁷⁵ Fahlman, 107-108; Berman, *Rebels on*, 73. According to Berman, Whitney was aware of Eakins as early as 1906 when newspaper clippings about him began to appear in her scrapbook.

feminized culture for art that represented “the strenuous life” espoused by President Theodore Roosevelt; thus, they painted in a decidedly virile way.⁷⁶

Helen Farr Sloan, the wife of John Sloan, wrote “the avant-garde [Henri] promoted had a common belief in a broad, democratic variety of talents, an ‘inclusive’ point of view in contrast with the more narrow ‘exclusive’ direction of a single-minded group such as the National Academy or the contemporary Stieglitz circle.”⁷⁷ Henri’s permissive pedagogy and promotion of personal expression allowed for women artists and a variety of styles amongst his students, unlike the elitist National Academy’s formal teaching strategies, which excluded many younger artists and women.⁷⁸ Alfred Stieglitz was the other main opponent to the National Academy in the early twentieth century; he was a renowned photographer and the owner of the progressive 291 Gallery. Stieglitz was instrumental in promoting European Modernists like Picasso, Cézanne, and Matisse as well as American Modernists like John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and Arthur Dove. Although Stieglitz and Henri were similar in their opposition to the Academy they differed in the aesthetic they promoted. Henri helped to radicalize subject matter through his portrayal of the urban environment, while Stieglitz promoted formal innovation following the styles of Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism.

⁷⁶ Berman, *Rebels on*, 71-73. For further discussion of the feminization of culture, see Hughes, 286-302.

⁷⁷ Wardle, *American Women Modernist*, 6.

⁷⁸ Erika Doss, “Complicating Modernism: Issues of Liberation and Constraint Among the Women Art Students of Robert Henri,” in *American Women Modernist: the Legacy of Robert Henri 1910-1945*, ed. Marian Wardle (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 118-119.

Gertrude remained a supporter of Henri and the Ashcan School throughout her life, although she did not really adopt their aesthetic ideals in her own sculptures. Gertrude was never drawn to Stieglitz or many of the artists he supported due to the advanced



Figure 1.3 Robert Henri, *Portrait of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney*, 1916, Whitney Museum of American Art.

abstract nature of much of the art. However, Gertrude also disliked Stieglitz's menacing ego and the elitism he expressed through his patronage.⁷⁹ He was often very antagonistic towards new artists or visitors to his gallery, and Stieglitz tightly controlled the group of artists he supported, maintaining an exclusive avant-garde aesthetic. At this point in Gertrude's life she was trying to escape the elitism of her upper class family not further enclose her social sphere. Remaining committed to realism, Gertrude bought four art works from an exhibition of The Eight, so named due to its eight members: Henri, Glackens, Sloan, Luks, Shinn, Prendergast, Lawson, and Davies.⁸⁰ These men exhibited together in 1908 at the Macbeth Gallery as an assault on the conservative exclusiveness of the National Academy.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Berman, *Rebels on*, 72-73. Berman also argues that at this point in Whitney's life, she could not have had business or personal dealings with a Jew.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 92. Whitney bought Henri's *Laughing Child*, Shinn's *Revue*, Lawson's *Winter on the River*, and Luks' *Woman with a Goose* for a cumulative price of \$2,225.

⁸¹ Wardle, *American Women Modernist*.

Gertrude's purchase of these works showed her staunch support for American realist art and her belief in unaccredited artists.

Whether she was conscious of it or not, this purchase was also a class rebellion, since most upper class patrons bought works by European old masters or by Academicians.⁸² Her family was a prime example of these patrons; the Vanderbilt mansions were filled with Renaissance paintings, classical art, and the work of society artists. During this period, American art had little value compared to Renaissance Masters or French Salon painting, and it received little attention from museums and galleries. American art outside of the National Academy received even less notice. Artist John Sloan, looking back on this period remembered how difficult it was to gain success as an American realist painter let alone find venues to exhibit art works, which meant he had less chance of selling work.⁸³ According to the "genteel tradition" great art looked to the past for inspiration, "certain forms had already been perfected, and that the duty of artist and architect was to adapt them to American conditions."⁸⁴ The Eight, working outside of the Academy, represented a democratic and politically radical group whose struggle to break the barriers of the art world hierarchy mirrored Gertrude's struggle to escape the confines generated by her upper class status and gender.

⁸² Berman, *Rebels on*, 92.

⁸³ John Sloan in Whitney Museum of American Art, *Juliana Force and American Art: A Memorial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1949), 34.

⁸⁴ Hughes, 216. Hughes argues the preference for European art resulted from an anxiousness about the lack of American traditions and history spurred by an increasing cultural nationalism. This caused Americans to claim others' cultural roots as their own.

Witnessing the difficulties American artists faced in finding space to exhibit, Whitney in 1908 opened two galleries next door to her Greenwich Village studio. These galleries, known as the Whitney Studio, hosted numerous exhibitions, including one-man shows, a “50-50 Art Sale” in which 50 percent of the proceeds went to World War I efforts, an exhibit of Chinese Modernists, a Russian Poster show, and an exhibition called *the Indigenous Show*, in which artists painted in the galleries.⁸⁵ Most of these shows were innovative in content and form and supported the Henri circle.

In 1915 Whitney extended her patronage efforts again, starting the Friends of Young Artists Group, which morphed into the Whitney Studio Club in 1918. The Club was managed by Juliana Force and was located on Fourth Street; it functioned as an exhibition space and gathering place for artists with a club room and art library. According to Force, the club was intended to “ ‘help the artist help himself’ ” by giving non-academic artists a space to show their work and socialize with each other.⁸⁶ Whitney took a holistic approach to patronage, and generally made purchases for her personal collection from every exhibition. The Club was inclusive in character, accepting artists from the Ashcan School and younger not yet established ones, as well as soliciting work from men and women artists.⁸⁷ Whitney, in fact, made a significant effort to exhibit and collect women artists, following Henri’s teachings. Whitney also understood the difficulties of women artists, being one herself; and

⁸⁵ McCarthy, 229-230; Guy Pène du Bois in Whitney Museum of American Art, *Juliana Force and American Art*, 45.

⁸⁶ Juliana Force, “The Whitney Museum of American Art,” *Magazine of Art* vol. XXXIX no.7 (1946), 271.

⁸⁷ Berman, *Rebels on*, 142-144.

by exhibiting female artists Whitney continued to promote women's pursuit of professional careers and oppose the National Academy.

Some critics labeled the Whitney Studio Club's exhibitions "catholic" in variety.⁸⁸ Unlike the National Academy exhibitions, the Club's shows were not juried nor were prizes offered.⁸⁹ This policy was endorsed by members of The Eight and was an intentional move away from Academy practices. Whitney and Force believed that the purchase of art works was the best way to encourage and help artists rather than the prize system, which provided the artist money but did not ensure sale of the art work. The Club closed in 1928 having outgrown its purpose with 400 members; the condition of American art had changed drastically with critics and the general public paying more attention.

Women and Art Patronage

Whitney's patronage of American artists was part of a rising tide of female art patrons during the end of the nineteenth century. Other prominent women collectors during this period included: Isabella Stewart Gardner, Sarah Cooper Hewitt, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Katherine Drier, and Peggy Guggenheim.⁹⁰ Collecting art was viewed as part of women's social role because artistic

⁸⁸ *The New Freeman*, vol. 1 (March 1930) Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm NWH-5, SIAAA. This description continued to be used with the Whitney Museum's exhibitions, see Margareta M. Salinger, "This Year's Yield," *Parnassus* vol. 5 no. 4 (May 1933), 24.

⁸⁹ "Mrs H.P. Whitney Reveals New Way of Aiding Artists" *New York Herald*, February 18, 1917, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm NWH-4, SIAAA.

⁹⁰ Kendall Taylor, "Pioneering Efforts of early Museum Women," in *Gender Perspectives: Essays on Women in Museums*, ed. Jane R. Gaser and Artemis A. Zenetou (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994): 11-27.

works were used to decorate the home. Whitney, in fact, began her collection of art in this manner, buying works from John La Farge as part of redecorating her home. Many women turned to collecting art works after having fulfilled their duties as wife and mother. For some, patronage became a career that allowed them to step outside of the domestic sphere without breaking too many social restrictions because of the gendered connections between women and art.⁹¹

Women art patrons also connected to late nineteenth and early twentieth century gender ideology because they fulfilled the traditional female role of nurturer through their support of artists.⁹² As collectors, museum founders, gallery dealers, and even critics women were nurturing art in a manner similar to their care of home and family. One article about the Whitney Museum of American Art expressly conveyed this connection calling Juliana Force “a gallery director, *mother* confessor...and Eighth Street paymaster.”⁹³ According to gender ideology, women were not creators or producers that activity belonged to men; therefore, women took the roles of caretaker, custodian, and civilizer.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Other practical changes contributed to the prominence of women art collectors. During the end of the nineteenth century widening economic and political opportunities combined with new technology instigated by industrialization and urbanization afforded middle and upper class women greater leisure time and new educational and employment experiences. An increase in overall wealth, smaller family size, and longer life expectancy were results of these changes. By 1870 women had gained control over their own dowries, incomes, and goods through the enactment of married women’s property laws. These laws were one of the most basic changes that affected women’s ability to collect as the laws allowed women control over their own assets.

⁹² Judy K. Collischan Van Wagner, *Women Shaping Art: Profiles of Power* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), 7.

⁹³ Talmey, “Whitney Museum of American Art.” Emphasis mine.

⁹⁴ For a discussion of female authorship, see Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity” in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* ed.s Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 245-267.

Media coverage encouraged this view of women patrons as mere supporters, often hailing their contribution to the art world but not granting these women real authority or agency. An article in *the Touchstone* magazine from 1919 highlights this contradiction. The article discusses an exhibition at the Whitney Studios, commenting “I am always filled with...appreciation and gratitude for these very beautiful galleries which Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney has planned and arranged for the production of the really best of modern art”⁹⁵ Here the author emphasizes Whitney’s supporting role; she is involved in the planning of galleries; she sets the stage for the production of art, but she is not involved in the creation of art. The article highlights Whitney’s traditional role in decoration but does not acknowledge the power Whitney exerted as a gallery owner, deciding who and what will be shown and how it will be seen.

One article that observed the opening of the Whitney Museum in 1931 also shows Whitney and Force in a diminished capacity. Even though it is a favorable review, the author, Henry McBride, begins by commenting the “stars in their courses conspired to favor the Whitney Museum of American art. The sign was right. The fates...were amiably disposed.”⁹⁶ This language suggests that Whitney and Force were not responsible for the success of their museum. Instead the Whitney Museum’s fate was in the hands of the gods. Although neither Henry McBride nor the author of the article in *the Touchstone* explicitly say Whitney and Force were not creative nor responsible for their successes, through their

⁹⁵ “Cuban Ways Shown in Randall Davey’s Recent Sketches,” *The Touchstone* 5 (May 1919), 122.

⁹⁶ Henry McBride, “Opening of the Whitney Museum,” *The New York Sun*, November 21, 1931.

language they bely underlying assumptions based on gender ideology. This ideology worked as a double edged sword, encouraging women's participation in the art world, but also diminishing their potential influence.

Collecting art at this time also coincided with the consumerist culture emerging in late nineteenth century America. According to Kathleen McCarthy, "a new definition of women's culture rooted in luxury, consumerism, and style" was fashioned during this period.⁹⁷ By the 1920's middle class women were encouraged to consume, investing in household goods and luxury items on an unprecedented scale. With this push towards consumption generated by mass production and advertising, it is easily seen how women collecting art was condoned, since art was a luxury item, and it could be used to beautify the home. Original art works were even exhibited and sold in department stores, such as Wanamaker's, Macy's, and Field's.⁹⁸

However, when Whitney moved beyond mere consumption to open galleries she was viewed with skepticism according to a retrospective article in *Vogue* by Allene Talmey. "It was difficult because of her unfortunate drawback. She was rich. Every one thought that the gallery would last a few months; that it was just a fad--as though Mrs. Whitney were playing...the rather adorable, but sickening role of Lady Bountiful to American art."⁹⁹ It was not just Whitney's wealth that generated this skepticism, but her position as a woman who

⁹⁷ McCarthy, 53.

⁹⁸ Neil Harris, "Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence," in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* ed. Ian M.G. Quimby (New York: WW Norton and Co, 1978).

⁹⁹ Talmey, "Whitney Museum of American Art." 131.

was not expected to seriously devote her time and energy to anything beyond social pursuits. The quote illustrates that underlying fear of women controlling American culture, which surfaced at the end of the nineteenth century and continued into the first decades of the twentieth century. Whitney's patronage moved beyond mere consumption of art to influence artists and other patrons; thus in an effort to belittle her power, Whitney is portrayed as only playing at art patronage.¹⁰⁰

Despite some critics' skepticism and opposition, many of these women not only collected art but also established a female presence at the forefront of art museum development, founding their own museums similar to Whitney. Rockefeller, Bliss, and Sullivan worked together to found the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1929 just two years before the Whitney Museum opened. Isabella Stewart Gardner created her art institution at Fenway Court in Boston, and Sarah Cooper Hewitt worked with her sister Eleanor to open the Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in the 1880's.¹⁰¹ Many of these patrons collected art in a neglected artistic area, and the museums they founded were often the first museums devoted to those artistic styles. Kathleen McCarthy suggests the collecting of undervalued art was common among women art patrons due to the lower prices- this included European avant-garde and American art. Most upper class women collectors did not control the vast amounts of money available to their male

¹⁰⁰ This is not the only critic of Whitney and Force that casts their patronage as play, see Paul Rosenfeld, "The Whitney Museum," *The Nation* vol 133 no. 3469 (1931), 732. In Rosenfeld's article, he says that the museum "is pretending to represent American art." Importantly, Rosenfeld does not simply say the museum misrepresents American art rather it is almost as if the museum is completely making it up.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, 13.

counterparts. Male collectors like J.P. Morgan and Frank Munsey could afford to pay vast sums for paintings and donate millions of dollars to art institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art; thus, wealthy male connoisseurs could drive prices way beyond a woman's budget in popular collecting fields like Renaissance art.

Whitney and Force's Ideology in Practice

An estimated 4,000 guests attended the inaugural exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art.¹⁰² The opening was greeted with much enthusiasm, and one reviewer commented that "there can be no doubt of the real usefulness of the Whitney Museum."¹⁰³ The Museum opened on West Eighth Street, formerly the site of the Whitney Studio Galleries; the buildings were remodeled from brownstone residences to form the museum. Whitney hoped to preserve their character while making twelve exhibition galleries and several offices for staff.¹⁰⁴ Most importantly, the Whitney Museum opened with the objective of presenting contemporary American art in an open, democratic, artist friendly atmosphere.

Before opening the Whitney Museum, Whitney and Force operated exhibition galleries where they sold and exhibited works by American artists. The gallery functioned for two years until Force's offer of Whitney's collection to the Metropolitan Museum was refused and they decided to open their own museum. The Whitney Museum of American Art

¹⁰² McCarthy, 238.

¹⁰³ Bryson Burroughs, "The Whitney Museum of American Art," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27 no. 2 (February 1932), 42.

¹⁰⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 289.

represented the beliefs of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force. They promoted an artist-first policy, opposed elitist strategies represented by the National Academy, desired an informal art institution, and unwaveringly supported American art through the organization, display style, and policies of the Whitney Museum.

Juliana Force was named director; other staff was drawn from her and Whitney's artist acquaintances, including Hermon More, curator, Edmund Archer, assistant curator of drawings, Karl Free, assistant curator of watercolors, and Eleanor Lamber, publicity manager.¹⁰⁵ With Juliana Force at the helm, Whitney chose a lesser role for herself in the everyday functioning of the museum. However, she directly funded the museum, was consulted on all major decisions, and made choices about museum policies, display, organization, and exhibitions.¹⁰⁶ In the words of Forbes Watson, commenting on Whitney and Force's relationship, Force "was the dynamo that moved Gertrude Whitney's activities in art forward and Mrs. Whitney controlled the dynamo."¹⁰⁷

Whitney and Force strongly believed that most museums were too traditional and thus out of touch with contemporary life.¹⁰⁸ They argued that museums "should be leaders, should reflect the life of the time in which they live." Whitney stridently critiqued the policy

¹⁰⁵ Whitney Museum of American Art, Minutes, October 15, 1930, Microfilm NWH4, Whitney Museum of American Art, Whitney Museum of American Art artists' files and records, 1914-1966, SIAAA (hereafter cited as Whitney Museum, Minutes).

¹⁰⁶ Berman, *Rebels on*, 303-311. The operating budget for the Whitney Museum was deducted under Whitney's estate expenditures and totaled about \$160,000. This figure included art purchases for the museum, which annually was \$20,000. Ultimately, Whitney bequeathed \$2.5 million to the museum.

¹⁰⁷ Friedman, 532.

¹⁰⁸ Force, "The Function," 25.

of museums “waiting until a painter or a sculptor had acquired a certain official recognition before they would accept his work within their sacred portals.”¹⁰⁹ The Whitney Museum of American Art acted completely contrary to this practice; it invested in the artists of the day. It also encouraged an informal, open atmosphere, where a “sympathetic environment” would be created to “bridge the gap between the museum and the public.”¹¹⁰ Whitney and Force felt this “gap” had to be diminished in order for contemporary American artists to sell art works. The Whitney Museum like other art museums attempted to influence visitor’s taste, but Whitney and Force wanted to not only influence taste but the art market, increasing the sale of American artists.

Ultimately, Whitney and Force were trying to democratize art; expanding the opportunities for American artists as well as making art more appealing to the middle and working classes. Whitney wanted the general public to be able to experience American art. “Art needs the layman,” she commented “it needs his opinions, his backing and his criticism. Expert advice is good, but it is not enough.”¹¹¹ Consequently, in an effort to make the museum accessible, it was open six days a week from ten to six o'clock and from two to six o'clock on Sundays- the day off for most of the working class. Also, admission to the museum was free.¹¹² Although these efforts were substantial, the Whitney Museum was not

¹⁰⁹ Friedman, 528.

¹¹⁰ Evelyn Hankins, “En/Gendering the Whitney's Collection of American Art,” in *Acts of Possession*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 169-170.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹² Whitney Museum, Minutes, October 15, 1930, SIAA.

open in the evenings; Force commented in an interview that staying open later was simply too costly due to staff and electrical expenses.¹¹³

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's interest in contemporary art stemmed from her support of American artists and their work. Whitney's enthusiasm rapidly increased when she moved into her studio in Greenwich Village and began to interact with a greater variety of artists. Whitney recognized the importance of American art, feeling both sympathy for misunderstood artists and an appreciation for art that expressed "a feel of the pulse of America."¹¹⁴ Whitney and Force hoped their patronage and the work of the museum would help enhance the prestige of and appreciation for American art.¹¹⁵ Force's inaugural address as the Museum's director made this point very clear, demanding that American art receive the same prestige given to European art work.¹¹⁶ Two years before she died, Whitney said on a radio broadcast, "I realized...that American art was a vital part of our American Culture, and I knew that the museum would play an important part in the development of a public's appreciation of the art of their country and their time."¹¹⁷

By 1931, when the Whitney Museum opened, American art was gaining in popularity and becoming an accepted part of the artistic canon. After World War I American art's

¹¹³ Juliana Force, "The Function," 26.

¹¹⁴ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, "I believe in American Art," [ca. 1931], 8a, Microfilm 2372, Whitney Museum of American Art, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers 1851-1975, SIAAA.

¹¹⁵ Juliana Force, "The Whitney Museum of American Art," *Creative Art* vol. 9 (Nov. 1931), 387.

¹¹⁶ Rosenfeld, 731.

¹¹⁷ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, *General Motors Program*, Radio Broadcast April 6, 1940, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm, 2356, SIAAA.

popularity increased due to several factors, including anti-immigrant sentiment, nativist beliefs, and the Great Depression, which caused a general turn inward in order to deal with the economic crisis at home. In art these events generated dislike of European influences. The Whitney Museum represented an innovative move, promoting this nascent interest in American art. Institutions like the Metropolitan barely collected twentieth-century American art, and there was no other museum solely devoted to collecting and exhibiting American artists.¹¹⁸ Cultural critic Thomas Craven represented many who opposed European art's prestige. He bemoaned museums' promotion of European art. "The criterion of museum authorities is rarity, not vitality, and their policy is to collect the extremely dead and latterly the exotic novelties of a played-out Europeanism."¹¹⁹

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney hoped the museum would provide a place where foreigners could experience American art. In the article, "I believe in American Art" Gertrude commented on the lack of such a place.¹²⁰ She recalled the Prince of Sweden's visit to the United States when he asked to be shown American modern painting, and although numerous addresses were given for different galleries and museums, no one could produce a signal institution where he might solely view American Art. Gertrude and Juliana hoped the museum would fill that void.

¹¹⁸ Force, "The Whitney Museum," *Creative Art*, 387-88. Force in particular seems to see the pioneer nature of her art patronage as over.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Craven, "Our Decadent Art Museums," *The American Mercury* (Dec. 1941), 683.

¹²⁰ Whitney, "I believe in American Art."

Juliana and Gertrude were not entirely anti-Europe. They supported many recent immigrant artists, such as Joseph Stella and Yasuo Kuniyoshi. By the 1930's Gertrude spent much of her time abroad in France, while Juliana owned a house in England where she frequently visited. However, they did express their dislike of the rigid National Academy standards for art, which were based on European art, and the early prestige and preference European art received from art institutions. In an essay about art, Gertrude clearly espoused her preference for American art. She wrote “[t]he individuality of America and the creative talent of its artists placed their sure touch on canvas and stone and we emerged from foreign ideals with ideals of our own. Ideals which could only have been the product of our time and our country.”¹²¹ Gertrude was vague about what these ideals were, but her main concern seems to be the self-expression of the artist.

The Introduction to the first catalog of the Whitney Museum of American Art explored what American art meant.

In a country...where diverse racial strains are inextricably woven into the texture of American character, the problem of recognizing indigenous traits as they appear in art is unusually complicated but not insuperable. We shall not attempt to simplify the question by defining in absolute terms the essence of the American spirit and requiring artists to conform to that definition. ...our chief concern is with the individual artist who is working out his destiny in this country, believing that if he is truly expressing himself, his art will inevitably reflect the character of his environment.¹²²

Of course, by “indigenous” Hermon More meant colonial settlers and by “environment” he

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Hermon More, “Introduction,” *Catalog of the Collections* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1931), 2.

meant the United States. But looking more closely at this quote, More does not discount the foreign influences prevalent in America; rather he exalts the individual whose expression through art must reflect his or her surroundings.

Hermon More, ultimately, followed the realist approach of Thomas Eakins and Robert Henri, which stressed the importance of painting from real life instead of allegorical or historical subjects. This quote suggests that the Whitney Museum considered art to be American only when it reflected the contemporary environment.¹²³ Early to mid twentieth century “Americanness” dealt with the industrial age and was seen as distinctly modern.¹²⁴ American artists often expressed a sense of the fast paced nature of American life; they regularly used the iconography of skyscrapers, mass produced goods, and machines, while some explored the disjunction between a utopian industrial society and mass poverty.¹²⁵ Whitney embraced these images of the United States, even as much of her class felt threatened by the diversity of the city and its influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe.

Throughout Force and Whitney's patronage, they primarily supported the work of realists, especially the Ashcan School as well as Social Realists and Regionalists. Artists represented in the collection included: John Sloan, Robert Henri, George Bellows, Thomas

¹²³ Whitney and Force were not alone in this definition of modern American art. Art critic, Thomas Craven, adopted a similar definition; he argued art must be closer to common peoples lives. Craven further points out museums that promote European art are agents for “snobbish and esoteric values,” which distance art from the everyday, see Craven, “Our Decadent,” 684-687.

¹²⁴ For discussion of American identity as expressed in art, see Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹²⁵ Corn, *The Great American Thing*, xvi-xvii.

Hart Benton, Isabel Bishop, Edward Hopper, Reginald Marsh, Katherine Schmidt, and John Steuart Curry.¹²⁶ Juliana Force especially hated the “inanity of academic painting”; she wanted an artist who had something to say, according to Guy Pene du Bois.¹²⁷ Social Realists, like members of the Ashcan School, emphasized the American urban scene but often with a leftist political content. Regionalists painted America's rural areas, especially the mid-West, portraying it in a nostalgic haze and expressing American values about the importance of family, morality, and agriculture. The Whitney Museum also collected and exhibited early American Modernists like Max Weber, Charles Bruchfield, Marsden Hartley, Morgan Russell, John Marin, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Stuart Davis who were experimenting with form, color, and abstraction.¹²⁸ Overall, the Whitney Studio Club and the Whitney Museum were inclusive in nature, attempting to show the diversity in the American art world.

As much as Whitney and Force espoused aesthetic aims and believed in native talent, they were also vastly affected by their everyday interactions with artists, in shaping museum policies. By opening a studio in Greenwich Village, Whitney both proclaimed herself an artist and opened the door to socializing with artists. Her studio became a gathering place for artists in the neighborhood; Whitney remembered artists constantly dropping by to discuss art

¹²⁶ Whitney Museum of American Art, *American Art of Our Century* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1961), 268-297.

¹²⁷ Pene du Bois, *Juliana Force and American Art*, 47.

¹²⁸ Many of these artists were staples in Stieglitz’s circle and, thus, rarely exhibited at the Whitney Studio or Club; however, Force recognized their importance to the history of American art and collected several of their works while planning for the museum. Force tried to sidestep Stieglitz as much as possible buying works by Demuth, Marin, and Hartley from other galleries, but she was forced to negotiate with Stieglitz for O’Keeffe’s *White Flower* and *The Mountain, New Mexico*, see Berman, *Rebels on*, 223-224, 302-303.

and “argue the topics of the day.”¹²⁹ Clare Sheridan, an English sculptor and writer, in 1921 recalled a small party where several artists showed up, including Child Hassam, Ruth Draper, Bob Chanler, Jo Davidson, and Paul Manship. Sheridan went on to say “I like Mrs. Whitney and her breakaway from the conventions. She seems to achieve the real Bohemian spirit.”¹³⁰ Sheridan was also from an elite family and, thus, sympathized with Whitney's determination to sculpt and socialize with other artists.

Juliana Force, as Whitney's secretary, manager of the Whitney Studio Club, and later director of the Whitney Museum, participated in these gatherings as well; she even held her own parties after openings of exhibitions and other events at the Whitney Museum. Force gained most of her knowledge about art from artists; Guy Pene du Bois even suggested that Force had no real interest in art, rather she was mainly interested in the producers of art.¹³¹ Juliana Force acted as Whitney's buffer while at her Greenwich Village studio, intercepting visitors and dealing with art patronage related inquiries. Force's interaction with artists increased over time as Whitney withdrew into sculpting and spent more time abroad. Berman suggests that after 1917 Whitney no longer interacted with new artists, but only maintained connections to her teachers and members of the Ashcan School.¹³²

However, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney empathized with artists as an artist herself. In

¹²⁹ Whitney, “I Believe in American Art,” 14.

¹³⁰ Clare Sheridan, *My American Diary*, 1922, Microfilm NWH4, Whitney Museum of American Art, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, 1851-1975, SIAA.

¹³¹ Pene du Bois, *Juliana Force and American Art*, 42.

¹³² Berman, *Rebels on*, 131-132.

recalling her early days as a sculptor, “I shall never forget the first time someone bought a little bronze figure of my own. ...I was lucky enough not to need the money for material things, but I was starved enough to be made happy that someone wanted what I made.”

Thus, her purpose in starting a gallery, club, and ultimately founding the Whitney Museum was very personal. “In starting my gallery, this was what I wanted to do for other artists in order that their work might be placed where it could be seen.”¹³³

From the first gallery to the museum, Whitney and Force followed an artist-first policy. Not only would the museum show contemporary American artists and attempt to gain prestige for these artists, but it would also respect artists and include them in decisions regarding museum policy and collections. This policy directly owed its existence to Whitney's career as an artist, and to her personal friendships with other artists. It was a highly unusual policy, both because artists were not generally the founders of museums, and because most institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art primarily collected the work of dead artists.¹³⁴ Furthermore, it gave artists agency within the museum world. Whitney and Force wanted to democratize art not just for spectators but also for artists. Today, museums commonly work with artists on exhibition design and collecting, but the Whitney Museum was instrumental in generating this type of collaboration.

Whitney and Force also took a holistic approach to patronage; they helped struggling

¹³³ Whitney, “I Believe in American Art,” 11.

¹³⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 440. Artists were on the board of the Metropolitan, but it was founded by a group of business men, and the Philadelphia Museum was also founded by an artist, Charles Wilson Peale, in the eighteenth century. For further information, see Nathaniel Burt, *Palaces for the People: A Social History of the American Art Museum* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1977).

artists financially by buying works of art, but Whitney through Force also sponsored trips to Europe and set up stipends. Commonly, Force would hear of an artist struggling to pay a bill and then offer to buy a work of art she found aesthetically valuable in order to assist. Whitney and Force also supplied funds to the Society of Independent Artists, *the Arts* magazine, and the Armory Show.¹³⁵ Importantly, Whitney and Force were often less concerned with delineating masterpieces than they were with artists; they wanted the value of the important living artist to be seen.¹³⁶ Force, when questioned by photographer David Eisendrath, denied having foresight and suggested that much of the work she bought had little staying power.¹³⁷ Instead, Whitney and Force worked to “stimulate, strengthen and encourage the creative impulse in America,” often seeing the life of the artist and the production of the artist as one entity.¹³⁸ Their motive was recognized and applauded by both artists and the media. An article in *The Touchstone* commented that the Whitney Studio was “one of the places in New York where art has a chance and where artists are respected.”¹³⁹

This emphasis on artists caused many conservative critics to view Whitney and Force’s patronage as mere charity with no real aesthetic merit. An article in *The Nation* by Paul Rosenfeld accused the Whitney Museum of being “born of the worthy desire to

¹³⁵ Whitney Museum of American Art, *American Art of Our Century*, 14.

¹³⁶ Force, “The Whitney Museum,” *Creative Art*, 388.

¹³⁷ Berman, *Rebels on*, 144.

¹³⁸ Forbes Watson to Juliana Force, September, 30, 1931, SIAAA; Berman, *Rebels on*, 224. In an article Juliana Force commented that the museum should play a “creative role in the art of its own time....” See Juliana Force, “The Whitney Museum of American Art,” *Magazine of Art*, 328.

¹³⁹ “Cuban Ways Shown in Randall Davey’s,” 124.

patronize and support a number of young and struggling artists,” which it was.¹⁴⁰ Rosenfeld argued further: “the canvases acquired were bought with an eye bent more to the struggles and promise of the artists than to the completeness of their expressions.”¹⁴¹ Other critics cited Force’s “lavish generosity” and called Whitney “Lady Bountiful to American art.”¹⁴² Whitney consistently denied that her patronage was pure charity, but her attention to and concern for artists is inescapable. “First and foremost,” she wrote “I buy what I like and because I think the artist has real talent, and what he is doing is worthwhile. Incidentally it helps the artist, of course, but not only materially.”¹⁴³

In reality, Force and Whitney pursued charitable and aesthetic aims; these two goals were very much intertwined in their minds. Not only did Whitney financially assist artists, but she also used art to raise funds for her other philanthropic endeavors. For instance, an early exhibition in 1914 at the Whitney Studio, the “50-50 Art Sale,” exhibited young artists, while also contributing to the European war effort with fifty percent of the proceeds donated to the American Hospital in Paris.¹⁴⁴ Much later in 1942 the Whitney Museum put on a similar exhibition for the American Field Service, donating money to this institution.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Rosenfeld, 732.

¹⁴¹ Rosenfeld, 732.

¹⁴² Forbes Watson, “Gallery Explorations,” *Parnassus* vol. 4 no. 7 (December 1932), 4; Talmey, “Whitney Museum of American Art,” 131.

¹⁴³ Whitney, “I Believe in American Art,” 5.

¹⁴⁴ McCarthy, 229.

¹⁴⁵ Whitney Museum of American Art, *Benefit Exhibition For the American Field Service Catalog* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1942).

However, this combination of charity and art does not mean Force and Whitney bought art without considering its aesthetic merits.¹⁴⁶ In a speech given in 1932 entitled “Think for Yourself,” Force highlights her own aesthetic evaluation process; she encouraged the art viewing public to “[g]o directly to the work of art and face it alone. Do not remember anything anybody has said about it....”¹⁴⁷ Force wanted people to make their own aesthetic judgements and believed in an intuitive emotional response. Whitney and Force’s intentional collecting of younger unestablished artists meant they risked collecting work not yet accepted by other art institutions or by the historical canon. American art during this period, although it had gained some acceptance, was still striving for recognition. Rosenfeld, who found fault with the charitable aspects of Whitney and Force’s collecting, also criticized the art collection as lacking “classic” Americans.¹⁴⁸ He felt the collection should focus more on the already accepted and prestigious American artists like Winslow Homer, while other more Modernist critics felt there were not enough “ultra-modern types.”¹⁴⁹

Whitney's art philanthropy must be viewed within the context of the Great Depression and the very dire circumstances it generated. With the stock market crash of 1929, a majority

¹⁴⁶ The critiques of Whitney and Force’s patronage as charity may have significantly resulted from their gender and the social role as middle and upper class women they were expected to play. Charity had long been viewed as part of women’s moralizing and civilizing function, and since the late nineteenth century women had increasingly manipulated charitable activities to move into the public sphere. For example, the New York Society of Decorative Arts founded in 1877 by Candace Wheeler pursued artistic goals while working to financially support struggling women. For further discussion of Wheeler and art charity, see McCarthy, *Women’s Culture*.

¹⁴⁷ Berman, *Rebels on*, 7.

¹⁴⁸ Rosenfeld, 731.

¹⁴⁹ Ralph Flint, “Whitney Museum of American Art Formally Opened,” *the Art News* (November 1931).

of Americans plunged into financial insecurity, debt, and even starvation. Artists were very hard hit since many people's disposable income to buy art was gone.¹⁵⁰ Whitney and Force were not the only ones financially assisting artists during the depression. The Artists Aid committee (started by Vernon Porter) paid for the organization of an outdoor exhibition to help artists sell works. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art, contributed money to studio rent, an artists' cafeteria, and bought works from financially strained artists through Juliana Force.¹⁵¹

Additionally, the federal government as part of the New Deal and Works Project Administration began in the mid-1930s to generate relief systems and work opportunities for writers, musicians, and artists. The first organization was the Public Works of Art Project, which then became the Federal Art Project and lasted until 1943, funding 3,750 artists to create 15,660 pieces of art.¹⁵² Juliana Force worked with the Public Works of Art Project as the head of the regional committee in New York. Although Force was a Republican and disliked the Roosevelt administration, she recognized that the dire economic situation called for new forms of philanthropy.¹⁵³ While not all of the artworks created by these projects were considered outstanding, nonetheless this type of “workfare” resulted in a democratic initiative for artists and the public alike that “added an exciting note to the arts in the

¹⁵⁰ Hughes, 450-451.

¹⁵¹ Watson, “Gallery Explorations,” 3; Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to Juliana Force, April 16, 1931, Whitney Museum of American Art, Juliana Force Papers, SIAAA; Berman, *Rebels on*, 310, 317.

¹⁵² Hughes, 451.

¹⁵³ Berman, *Rebels on*, 335.

1930s.”¹⁵⁴ One particularly unique effort was the creation of murals across America in public buildings like post offices, court houses, libraries, and schools where people of all classes could view and appreciate art. Although the Federal Art Project allowed freedom of expression, it did considerably favor Regionalism, especially for murals; the style was recognizable to most Americans, and Regionalist subjects tended to show rural regions all over America.

The government, for the first time in America, treated members of the creative professions like they were part of a productive workforce. Susan Ware, a woman's historian, suggests this initiative resulted from “a quest for cultural democracy.”¹⁵⁵ The Federal Art Project was an effort to bring art to the masses. “Art for the millions,” was the popular New Deal phrase. This concept suggested that art should be part of the everyday and integrated the artist into “the mainstream of American life.” Furthermore, the Federal Art Project encouraged artists to represent America and a uniquely American expression in art. These ideas were in concert with Whitney and Force's ideology; Whitney consistently touted art's need to reflect the contemporary environment. She also encouraged the layman's view of art and sought to respect artists, seeing them as a vital part of America's cultural world and workforce.

The final element in Force and Whitney's ideology was the desire for an informal art museum. They wanted the museum to connect with all its visitors, both the general public

¹⁵⁴ Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930's* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 141.

¹⁵⁵ Ware, 141.

and artists, providing a friendly atmosphere. The Whitney Museum would not lord over the visitor, but bring the public “more nearly to a comprehension of the joy there is in art,” and “interest the public in encouraging the artist”¹⁵⁶ Whitney argued that “we take art too seriously. A man removes his hat, walks on tiptoe and speaks in a low voice when he enters a gallery.” Furthermore she felt that art today “doesn’t enter into our lives, that is the trouble. It has nothing to do with what we think, feel and the way we act....[We] approach [art] once a week or when our friends die, with bated breath and best clothes.”¹⁵⁷

In general, both women saw museums as too traditional and restrictive. Force even commented that opening a museum “confined” Whitney’s art patronage, since a museum “frightens and intimidates on the outside and it paralyzes thought on the inside.”¹⁵⁸ Part of Whitney and Force’s opposition to existing art institutions stemmed from the formal atmosphere in museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Their imposing architecture and their elitist attitude towards art often made lower class visitors uncomfortable even though many museums ideally hoped to educate and “better” these visitors; it also meant the exclusion of American art. Most American art museums were controlled by powerful, predominately male boards of trustees; members of these boards preferred academic art to younger un-established artists, and generally European to American art. This attitude also dominated the National Academy whose “hegemony made for the virtual disenfranchisement

¹⁵⁶ Force, “The Function,” 25.

¹⁵⁷ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, “The ‘Useless’ Memorial” April 1920, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm NWH-5, SIAAA.

¹⁵⁸ Force, “The Whitney Museum,” *Creative Art*, 388.

of most liberal or independent artists. In this respect, the politics of art mimicked big business practices of the time. Benefits and profits were distributed among a very few, who monopolized sales, exhibition space, awards, and commissions.”¹⁵⁹

Force and Whitney were determined to be more inclusive, hoping to represent a variety of styles and artists in the Whitney Museum. Yet they also recognized that by opening a museum they had to be more discriminating, because of the significance and prestige museums confer on all the objects they house. In an article from 1931, Force commented “[t]o the onlooker there is a vast difference between a picture in a museum and a picture in a studio or in a gallery. The public is impressed, and rightly so.”¹⁶⁰ The tension between being inclusive but also selective presented a problem for the Whitney Museum, given Whitney and Force’s goal of democratizing art and the informal atmosphere they wanted to create. Whitney and Force wanted to confer status to the art they collected and assert their authority in doing so. Yet they also opposed the formal atmosphere they associated with selectivity, such exclusivity limited thought and forced visitors to act a specific way. Force wanted to take the “whisper...out of the gallery” and eliminate the “sacrosanct attitude toward art.”¹⁶¹

A central question for Whitney and Force became: how would the Whitney Museum gain prestige yet remain informal? This question was primarily resolved by Whitney and

¹⁵⁹ Berman, *Rebels on*, 68

¹⁶⁰ Force, “The Whitney Museum,” 388.

¹⁶¹ Force, “The Whitney Museum,” 389.

Force through their choice to design the Whitney Museum like a modern American home. The design and decor of the Whitney Museum reflected Whitney and Force's opposition to existing art institutions and the women's denial of elitist strategies that excluded American art and the living artist. They hoped the home-like design of the Museum would make art more approachable, in keeping with their democratic goals. The domestic space of the Museum, however, proved problematic for the Whitney Museum. Art critics and journalists labeled the Museum personal and feminine. The gender ideology Whitney and Force rebelled against in their efforts to find professional fulfillment often rebounded back to undermine their patronage, diminish their agency, and belittle their patronage as charity. Similarly, the design of the Whitney Museum like a home even though it connected to feminine gender roles of homemaker and decorator produced negative perceptions of the Museum.

CHAPTER TWO

An Informal Museum

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force's rebellion against the National Academy of Design and traditional art museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art created one of the most noted and criticized aspects of the Whitney Museum of American Art- its domestic display. Whitney and Force choose to design the Museum like a middle class home, following contemporary interior design principles, in efforts to make the Museum less formal and the art more approachable. They hoped that this design choice "would make visitors not just comfortable but at home with American art," encouraging people to accept American art and feel at ease looking at it.¹ However, this design choice also suggests that Whitney and Force were not willing to relinquish all gender ideals that associated women with the domestic and placed emphasis on the home as a symbol of morality and comfort. Furthermore, the display style situated the Whitney Museum within a historical framework that used the private and domestic for art exhibition.

Whitney and Force created an informal museum as part of their goal to democratize the arts, trying to balance the tension between inclusivity and the selectivity involved in museum collections. The structure of the Whitney Museum of American Art as private; the use of a domestic display style; and the policies associated with the biennial exhibitions, the sale of art and the goal of being comprehensive, all led to critical perceptions of the Whitney

¹ Evelyn Hankins, "En/Gendering the Whitney's Collection of American Art," in *Acts of Possession*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 165.

Museum as personal, feminine, conservative, and uncritical. These perceptions hindered the Museum's institutional status.

Art historian Evelyn Hankins argues the domestic display of the Whitney Museum helped create the media and art critics' perception of the Museum as personal and feminine. Reviews of the Whitney Museum varied, but predominately critics noted the Museum's comfortable, domestic setting. Most praised the design of the Museum and its devotion to American art but expressed mixed feelings about the Museum's art collection. These critics included: Frances Edgar, Helen Appleton Read, Henry McBride, and Isamu Noguchi. A few conservative critics dismissed the Museum almost entirely, such as Paul Rosenfeld, while others explicitly condemned the display style. Allene Talmey, Florine Stettheimer, and Jane Cobb offered three of the most pointed critiques of the Whitney Museum and its display, specifically commenting on the Museum's feminized space and its effect on the art collection. Other views of the Whitney Museum rejected the policies surrounding the Museum's biennial program, leading critics to label the Museum conservative and uncritical. Overall, criticism of the Museum can be mapped chronologically with negative reviews intensifying and occurring more frequently in the late 1930's, culminating with Talmey and Cobb's articles and Stettheimer's painting, *Cathedrals of Art*.

Structure of the Whitney Museum of American Art

Whitney and Force generated an informal atmosphere through the Whitney Museum's structure as well as its display. First of all, the Whitney Museum was a private institution; it did not have a board of trustees, instead the museum was under the sole governance of Force

and Whitney. The lack of a board placed Force in a precarious position wherein she accrued both the credit for successful museum endeavors and the fault for any failures. Most American art institutions from their inception were run and organized by a board of trustees (primarily male), following a modern corporate model.² Whitney and Force wanted to maintain direct control over the institution, and Whitney was not persuaded to adopt a board until 1935 when the museum transitioned to a non-profit tax exempt institution. Whitney felt non-profit status better equipped the museum to continue in perpetuity. Force greatly disliked the idea, realizing she would have to answer to others besides Whitney, but the members of the board remained closely related to Whitney.³

In a further effort to keep the Whitney Museum the sole vision of Force and Whitney, it maintained a prohibition on gifts until 1949.⁴ This policy prevented anyone from donating money or art to the Museum outside of Juliana, Gertrude, and the Whitney family. Lloyd Goodrich, who wrote for the Museum and in 1935 became research curator, recalled that “Mrs. Whitney wanted to protect the museum against social and wealthy pressures to have certain artists included in the collection.”⁵ The narrow financial base of the Whitney Museum contrasted greatly with other art institutions in New York like the Metropolitan

² Kathleen McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

³ Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1990), 385-386. The members of the board included: Frank Crocker, Juliana Force, Sonny Whitney, Flora Whitney Miller, William Adams Delano.

⁴ Garnett McCoy, “Lloyd Goodrich Reminisces-Part II,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (1983), 13.

⁵ Ibid.

Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. These museums were started with board of trustees and sought to diversify their financial base, utilizing private donations, public funds, and generated revenue. Although the prohibition on gifts probably prevented several important donations, it highlights Whitney's refusal to collaborate philanthropically with others from her class and her determination to keep the Museum private.

The prohibition on gifts and the lack of a board of trustees differentiated the Whitney Museum from other New York art museums and it made the Museum seem less institutional. However, the informal atmosphere of the Whitney Museum was primarily created by its decoration like an American home. Force was the agent behind how the Whitney Museum looked; she placed much emphasis on proper lighting and the opening date was pushed back twice due to renovations and decorating.⁶ Both women agreed the Museum should provide a "sympathetic environment" and "auspicious circumstances" for American art, meaning a space in harmony with American art that would confer its status, while celebrating it as a vital part of the art world.⁷

Domestic Display at the Whitney Museum

To create harmony with American art, Whitney and Force had to distance the Whitney Museum in terms of display style, decor, and architecture from museums like the

⁶ Whitney Museum of American Art, Minutes, 1930, Microfilm NWH4, Whitney Museum of American Art Artists' Files and Records, 1914-1966, Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Whitney Museum, Minutes).

⁷ Whitney Museum of American Art, *Whitney Museum of American Art: History, Purpose, and Activities*, Catalog to the Collection (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1937), 5; Juliana Force, *Catalog of the Collection*, Whitney Museum of American Art (New York: Macmillan Company, 1931).

Metropolitan, which were designed in the classical Roman style, using columns, porticos, and marble to evoke a monumental form of architecture, such as a temple or palace.⁸ The physical prominence of Roman style architecture connotes the importance of the institution



Figure 2.1 Philadelphia Museum of Art ca. 1929. Source: Philadelphia Museum of Art, "Report of a Survey of Visitors to the Museum in Its First Year" *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 25 no. 130 (Dec., 1929): 3-11.

and, consequently, the collection housed inside. Since this architectural style is used in most government buildings, its use in museum architecture references the nation-state and, ultimately, Imperial Rome. State authority is,

thus, equated with the idea of civilization, and the

museum is viewed with the authority to delineate a canon of art.⁹ Most universal survey museums in America utilize this architectural type and set as their example the Louvre in France; art museums like the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan all built Neoclassical buildings at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰

According to Duncan and Wallach, these museums also use monumental staircases, great hall

⁸ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 52.

⁹ Duncan and Wallach, "The Universal Survey," 52-53.

¹⁰Michael Clapper, "The Chromo and the Art Museum: Popular and Elite Art Institutions in Late Nineteenth-Century America," in *Not at Home: the Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 46-47; Duncan and Wallach, "The Universal Survey," 66; "Art Museums Humanized," *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 31, 1928.

like spaces, and proscribed routes to assign special meaning to certain art works or styles and ritualize the museum going experience, eliciting specific behavior from visitors, such as awe and deference.¹¹ Whitney and Force “perceived the imposing weight of authority and tradition sanctioned by the expansive, classical galleries of venerable art museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a serious hindrance to both the production and enjoyment of contemporary artworks.”¹²

The Whitney Museum of American Art was not built in the Neoclassical tradition although its façade utilized the Beaux Arts style, which had classical elements.¹³ The Museum was housed in four remodeled brownstones on Eighth Street. The buildings were renovated by Noel&Miller, a design firm connected with Whitney’s Family, and the interior was designed by Juliana Force with the help of Bruce Buttfield.¹⁴ The Museum, five stories tall, consisted of twelve galleries with offices scattered throughout for the curators and an apartment on the fifth floor for Juliana Force. The building also featured a library, director’s office, shipping room, and reading room. Importantly, the building retained original elements of the four houses, which had separate floor plans, different ceiling heights, uneven

¹¹ Duncan and Wallach, “The Universal Survey,” 53.

¹² Hankins, 165.

¹³ William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff, *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 164. Beaux Arts design was often used in civic architecture and was popularized in American by McKim, Mead, and White, but the style was declining in New York beginning in the 1920’s due to Modernist Architecture and the International Style.

¹⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 289. Whitney’s daughter Flora married G. Macculloch Miller the second partner at the firm.

floors, and oddly shaped rooms.¹⁵ Whitney made a point of specifying that the intimacy of the homes be retained, mentioning in a note titled “Plans for the Museum” that she wanted “rooms not galleries.”¹⁶



Figure 2.2 Whitney Museum Front Façade. Source: Whitney Museum of American Art Artists' Files and Records, 1914-1966, Microfilm NWH4-6, SIAAA.



Figure 2.3 Whitney Museum of American Art ca. 1931-1932. Photograph by Nyholm & Lincoln

The four brownstones were united by a hundred foot, salmon-pink stucco façade detailed with white stone lintels and moldings. Two columns marked the understated entrance, but here the classical elements ended. The Whitney Museum did not have a colonnade, portico and porch, or a massive flight of stairs the visitor must ascend like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Instead the visitor walked into the building directly off the street without encountering fanfare or blatant allusions to classical temples. Chrome details, aluminum doors, and a large bas-relief eagle over the entrance marked the modern American character of the Museum. The eagle was designed by Karl Free, and a similar version of it was used on the Museum’s stationary. This sculpture

¹⁵ “Museum Remodeling and Restoration” *The Architectural Forum* (June 1932), 606.

¹⁶ B.H. Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney* (New York: DoubleDay and Co, 1978), 529.

triumphantly evoked the Whitney Museum’s mission, signaling the American art inside; the aluminum doors, which were decorated with five pointed stars, also echoed this motif. In a manner similar to universal survey museums, the symbol of the eagle and five pointed star connected the Whitney Museum to the nation state by alluding to the federal government. Hankins accurately suggests that the front’s “classical design immediately invoked the long history and authority of Western artistic traditions, as well as the Whitney’s presumed position at the end of that lineage, while the newer elements signified the museum’s innovative status.”¹⁷

Once inside, the visitor entered a small entrance court consisting of a sculpture by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, nude nymphs in niches by John Gregory, and a short double staircase. The artworks in this space were not arbitrary; their inclusion sent messages to museum visitors albeit in subtle ways.¹⁸ The sculptures by Gregory, *Wood Nymph* and *Bacchante*, served as a historical marker linking American art with Western artistic traditions, since the nymphs



Figure 2.4 Whitney Museum, Entrance Court. Source: Force, Juliana, “The Whitney Museum of American Art” *Creative Art*.

¹⁷ Hankins, 168.

¹⁸ For further discussion regarding museum display and the meaning given to objects by their placement, see Victoria Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005); and Duncan and Wallach, “The Universal Survey.”

recalled classical mythology.¹⁹ Whitney's sculpture, *Arlington Fountain*, conveyed several messages. First it signified her claim on the museum space by positioning her well known work as the first artwork seen by the visitor. Secondly, the sculpture's inclusion in the museum legitimized her body of work; finally, it proclaimed Whitney's authority to exhibit other art as a successful artist in her own right.²⁰ At the top of the staircase hung another



Figure 2.5 George Bellows, *Dempsey and Firpo*, 1924, Whitney Museum of American Art.

deliberately positioned art work, George Bellows' *Dempsey and Firpo*.²¹ This painting shows a virile image of a famous boxing match; Bellows was well known for his earlier

¹⁹ Scott and Rutkoff, 183; Lorado Taft, *The History of American Sculpture* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1924). Scott and Rutkoff identify one of the nymphs as Gregory's *Wood Nymph*. According to Taft Whitney possessed two Gregory sculptures: *Wood Nymph* and *Bacchante*.

²⁰ McCarthy, 189. McCarthy argues that women artists assumed a lead in art patronage in the early twentieth century.

²¹ Berman, *Rebels On*, 311.

boxing scenes *Stag at Sharkey's* and *Both Members of This Club* painted in 1909. *Dempsey and Firpo*, painted in 1924, lacks the explosive energy and vigorous brushstrokes of Bellows' earlier scenes, but it still proclaims the virile masculinity promoted by realists like Robert Henri. Its placement at the top of the main staircase signaled the fight for American art by Whitney and Force and the Museum's triumphant victory. Reviewers of the opening exhibition picked up on this fighting metaphor, noting the painting in their articles. One journalist, Henry McBride, commented that the announcement for the museum was similar to "a battle cry to which the only answer could be another hurrah."²²

The Whitney Museum of American Art's intimate scale coupled with the inclusion of curtains, carpets, furniture, colorfully painted walls, and other decorative details contributed to its resemblance of an American home with slightly less furniture. Certain galleries had



Figure 2.6 Whitney Museum, Grey Gallery. Source: Hankins, 171.

stronger domestic signifiers than others, such as the Grey Gallery located on the second floor. In 1932, it was decorated with a table and chairs, and catalogs were evenly spaced along the table like place settings. The Grey Gallery also featured a fire place with decorative mantel and grate. These decorative elements

²² Henry McBride, "Opening of the Whitney Museum," *New York Sun* (November 21, 1931), 12.

made the Grey Gallery look like a dining room set for an upcoming dinner party.²³

Every inch of the Museum was considered for its decorative contribution to the totality of the museum environment. Even the hallways in the Museum were used to display paintings and sculptures, and the walls featured stenciled stars and eagles, continuing the American iconography motif.²⁴ Hankins argues there was no proscribed route through the museum, “instead the effect was one of casual roaming.”²⁵ While the lack of an intended passage would have contributed to the Museum’s informal atmosphere, most of the galleries were labeled by number with signs posted and identified in the catalogs. This labeling suggests that there was an intended route, although the galleries were not entirely laid out in chronological order with the entrance gallery labeled as Gallery II.²⁶ Forbes Watson noted the complicated layout, arguing “its happy disregard for interior logic creates a handicap.”²⁷ He continued describing the personal nature of the Museum: “partly private, partly domestic, partly public, it is much warmer and more endearing than the coldly logical public museum, and much less efficient as a place of display.”²⁸ Although Watson was close friends with Whitney and Force, he was not above offering them critical advice. His criticism became

²³ Hankins, 171.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Samuel H. Gottcho, Gallery II Photo, 1932, Whitney Museum of American Art Artists' Files and Records, 1914-1966, Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as SIAAA).

²⁷ Forbes Watson, “Gallery Explorations,” *Parnassus* (1932), 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

increasingly unfavorable as he adopted a more Modernist stance and when he had a falling out with Force, which resulted in Whitney's withdrawal of funds for the *Arts*.

By designing the Whitney Museum of American Art like an American home, Whitney and Force not only created an informal atmosphere but also legitimized their entrance into the public sphere by pursuing a gendered activity- decorating a home.²⁹ The Whitney Museum blended the public and private sphere to create a liminal space where Whitney and Force could pursue art patronage with the authority sanctioned by a museum but still within what was considered appropriate activity for middle and upper class women.³⁰ The Museum was public in its function, to exhibit American art, but private in its institutional status and domestic environment. Whitney and Force opposed the gender ideology that limited their roles through their refusal to remain in the private domestic sphere, finding fulfillment outside of home and family. However, their design choices suggest they ascribed to certain proscribed gender roles or at least found them useful.³¹ Lois Palken Rudnick argues the mixing of public and private was a common method of women leaders; "they blurred and

²⁹ Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930's* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982). Ware argues the Great Depression reinstated domestic ideology that had been relaxing because families were forced to turn inward and work together to overcome the financial hardship; women's roles within the home became more important as household skills were vital contributions to family survival. Separate sphere ideology remained important politically and professionally even though women experienced more sexual and individual freedom. The home as a symbol still had resonance in American society.

³⁰ Hankins, 165. Hankins suggests that the Whitney Museum worked as a liminal space.

³¹ Berman, *Rebels on*, 422. Force was very interested in interior decoration, spending energy and money to remodel every home she bought. Force was also friends with several decorators in New York and she was a guest speaker at the annual dinner for the American Institute of Decorators.

extended gender boundaries by creating porous spaces between their domestic and professional lives.”³²

The Whitney Museum and Interior Design Tenets

In designing the interior of the Whitney Museum, Force utilized several tenets of early twentieth century domestic interior design: the potential expressiveness of color, use of parallel and perpendicular lines, simplicity, necessity of comfort, and harmony. Advice on decoration proliferated during this period; whole books were devoted to the topic as well as magazine articles. In the early twentieth century, color assumed new importance as a way to express emotion through certain hues; blue connoted intelligence and restraint, green restfulness, red energy and passion, and yellow light.³³ Decorators prescribed color wheels to determine the correct color of a specific room, warning against too much color or mismatched combinations. The color of a room was intended to reflect the female homemaker’s looks, personality, and style.³⁴ The Whitney Museum readily used this color theory, employing tinted rose, canary yellow, gray, and powder blue paints on the walls at the opening exhibition.³⁵ Each gallery was primarily monochromatic with curtains, furniture, and carpet all matching tonally.

³² Lois Palken Rudnick, “Modernizing Women: The New Woman and American Modernism,” in *American Women Modernists: the Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945*, ed. Marian Wardle (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 166.

³³ Emily Post, *The Personality of a House: the Blue Book of Home Design and Decoration* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co, 1930), 169-173.

³⁴ Post, 169-173; Hankins, 176.

³⁵ Ralph Flint, “Whitney Museum of American Art Formally Opened,” *The Art News* (November 1931); Isamu Noguchi, “On View in the New York Galleries,” *Parnassus* 3, no. 8 (December 1931).

Emily Post not only recommended color theory in her widely popular home decorating advice book, but she also urged women to create harmony through lines. She recommended the use of parallel and perpendicular lines in furniture, carpeting, patterns, and ornament to echo the typical rectangular room; however, curved lines could be utilized minimally with the right repetition.³⁶ The Museum made use of this design proscription with strong emphasis on vertical and horizontal lines with a minimum of curves throughout the interior. The use of vertical and horizontal lines can be seen in a photograph of one of the galleries where the round bench echos the shape of the hat in Niles Spencer's painting, *The Green Table*, but the rest of the lines in the gallery are very straight.



Figure 2.7 Whitney Museum, Gallery. Photograph by Nyholm & Lincoln. Source: Whitney Museum of American Art Artists' Files and Records, 1914-1966, Microfilm N614, SIAAA

Whitney and Force also emphasized comfort. Carpets were provided so the visitor would not get “museum feet,” and benches and settees were conveniently placed around the galleries for visitors to stop and contemplate a painting.³⁷ One reviewer, Frances Edgar, commented, “in a museum when one comes upon a beautiful antique chair or lounge, there is a gentle but firm hint in the way of a forbidding cord...a hint that this furniture is to be seen and not sat on. This is not so at the Whitney Museum. Every room is provided with

³⁶ Post, 308-309.

³⁷ Allene Talmey, “Whitney Museum of American Art and the One-Woman Power Behind It-Juliana Force,” *Vogue* (February 1940).

beautiful chairs, lounges or settees...here one may sit and look and long at a favorite painting.”³⁸ Comfort was seen as an important element in domestic design; Emily Post required comfort as part of her “Four Essential Requirements of Every Home.”³⁹ Karen Haltunen argues comfort became an important part of domestic design due to the transformation of the parlor into the living room whose function was no longer proof of respectability; thus, formality became less important.⁴⁰

As Edgar pointed out, the furniture in the Whitney Museum was a mix of seating types, but it was also stylistically diverse. Force intermixed modern pieces with Colonial and



Figure 2.8 Whitney Museum, Gallery VI ca. 1932 Source: Whitney Museum of American Art Artists' Files and Records, 1914-1966, Microfilm NWH4-6, SIAAA

Victorian antiques. Photos of the galleries as well as reviews of the museum testify to this design element.⁴¹ One such photo of Gallery VI shows a federalist bench with straight simple lines, while through an arch way into another gallery a Victorian sofa is visible with upholstered cushions

and a curvaceous back. Interior designers like Elsie de Wolfe promoted this mixing

³⁸ Frances Edgars, “The Urge to Draw,” *New York Evening Post* (December 9, 1931); Hankins, 173.

³⁹ Post, 6.

⁴⁰ Karen Haltunen, “From Parlor to Living Room Domestic Space, Interior Decoration, and the Culture of Personality,” in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1989), 171. Haltunen argues this transformation occurred between 1890 and 1930.

⁴¹ Flint, “The Whitney Museum,” 7.

of furniture styles to better reflect the homemaker's personality.⁴² De Wolfe's book, *The House in Good Taste* written in 1913, was similar to Emily Post's advice manual and advocated simplicity, visual effect, and comfort. Much of these two authors' advice reflected Modernist design principles, which were moving away from the overly ornamental, stuffy interiors of the Victorian bourgeois home. However, de Wolfe's mixing of furniture styles was not advocated by Modernist designers. The Rational Household movement along with architectural Modernists promoted light, verticality, simplicity, and utility over decoration.⁴³ The Whitney Museum adopted many of these modern elements, incorporating an extensive electric lighting system, harmony in lines, and simplifying ornament. But the Museum's use of colored walls, curtains, antiques, and art objects placed like ornaments identified the Museum less with aesthetic Modernism and more with the bourgeois home.

Many of the antique pieces in the Whitney Museum were examples of Shaker furniture that Force started collecting in the 1920's.⁴⁴ Force first began collecting folk art in 1914 after purchasing Barley Sheaf Farm in rural Pennsylvania; she viewed folk art as a significant part of American art, representing indigenous American culture. Force's interest in Shaker art was an extension of her love of folk art. The directness and gravity of Shaker art appealed to Force, not to mention the unconventionality of collecting what was viewed by many as a primitive art form and categorized as craft or low art. One of the best examples of

⁴² Halttunen, "From Parlor," 183; David Park Curry, "Never Complain, Never Explain: Elise De Wolfe and the Art of Social Change," in *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Patronage and Patronage*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997): 52-78.

⁴³ Penny Sparke, *As Long As It's Pink: the Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 99-157.

⁴⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 147.

Shaker furniture in the Whitney Museum is a Shaker dining room table that appeared in the Grey Gallery in early 1932, and was used in Gallery V for the first Whitney Biennial Exhibition.

Force often juxtaposed art with furniture, organizing paintings around the furniture in a gallery and placing smaller sculptures on tables and mantels. The Whitney



Figure 2.9 Whitney Museum, Gallery V ca. 1932 Source: Whitney Museum of American Art Artists' Files and Records, 1914-1966. Microfilm NWH4-6. SIAAA

Museum did not uphold art world

hierarchies that placed painting

and sculpture above the decorative arts. By displaying painting, sculpture, and the decorative arts all together in a domestic setting, Whitney and Force flouted those hierarchies.⁴⁵ As Hankins suggests, the positioning of art relative to the galleries' other decorative elements gave the paintings a "decorative function," consequently, equalizing the decor of the museum with the art work displayed.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For a discussion of how Gardner was able to oppose this hierarchy, see Anne Higonnet "Private museums, Public Leadership: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Art of Cultural Authority," in *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Patronage and Patronage*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997): 79-92. Further research into how the Whitney Museum's exhibitions of decorative arts were organized and how the objects were displayed is necessary to fully make this claim.

⁴⁶ Hankins, 170-171.

Visitors to the Whitney Museum recognized the highly decorative nature of the Whitney Museum. A painting by Florine Stettheimer from 1942, *Cathedrals of Art*, depicts the three pillars of art in America: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, shown in the center, the Museum of Modern Art, on the left, and the Whitney Museum of Art, on the right. The painting acted as an acerbic critique of the American art world, pointing out the faults of each art museum.⁴⁷ According to Hankins, *Cathedrals of Art* criticizes the Whitney Museum for its decorative space, showing the Whitney Museum galleries devoid of art except Gertrude



Figure 2.10 Florence Stettheimer, *Cathedrals of Art*, 1942, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁴⁷ Berman, *Rebels On*, 462-463.

Vanderbilt Whitney's sculpture, *Chinoise*, which serves to symbolize Whitney and her death not art.⁴⁸ In contrast, the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan are filled with paintings and artists' names. By marking the art displayed in the Whitney Museum as decorative, Whitney and Force may have diminished the painting and sculptures' status as art. Other commentaries noted generally "[h]ow different the Whitney Museum is from the traditional museum formula," while some specifically called attention to the informal, domestic atmosphere, calling the Museum "decoratively a distinct departure."⁴⁹

The Use of the Domestic in Art Exhibition

Even as commentators emphasized the Whitney Museum's difference from other art museums and Whitney and Force promoted this perception, the use of domestic space in art display was not unusual or unprecedented. In fact, in 1847 James McNeil Whistler experimented in his first one man show with creating a domestic space in his dealer's gallery to suggest how his paintings would look in a buyer's home. Whistler set a precedent for Impressionist exhibitions, which from 1879-1881 used private, intimate spaces to exhibit their paintings.⁵⁰ Impressionist artists like Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, and Camille Pissarro wanted to remove their art from the crass commercialism of the French Salon. In situating their paintings in a private, domesticated setting with colored walls and frames they hoped to better contextualize and represent their art. However, this display style had the effect of

⁴⁸ Hankins, 163-164.

⁴⁹ Helen Appleton Read, "The Whitney Museum," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 22, 1931; Isamu Noguchi, "On View in the New York Galleries," 7.

⁵⁰ Martha Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," *The Art Bulletin* LXXIII no. 4 (December 1991), 610-611.

subordinating the autonomy of the object and the individuality of the artist to the total environment of the exhibition space, marking the paintings as decorative. Martha Ward suggests none of the Impressionists were quite comfortable with this arrangement, and Pissarro even began to think it operated too much like a gimmick.⁵¹ Neo-Impressionists moved away from this exhibition style, preferring a public venue and more neutral environment that emphasized the individual works of art.⁵²

This display style did not end, however, with the Neo-Impressionists; art museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston incorporated paintings into total environments in the form of period rooms. A period room combines architecture, art, decorative arts, and furniture to re-create a specific style from a certain time and place. Steven Conn argues Fiske Kimball pioneered this display style while director at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in order to appeal to the non-specialist who needed visual context for art objects.⁵³ This display style was extremely popular during the early twentieth century; multiple American art museums installed period rooms at this time, notably the Metropolitan Museum of Art with the installation of the American Wing.⁵⁴ Some critics like Frank Jewett Mather, a Princeton art scholar, felt this

⁵¹ Ward, 611-612.

⁵² Ibid., 619-620.

⁵³ Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1877-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 226.

⁵⁴ Clapper, "The Chromo and the Art Museum," 46-47. These museums were run by men, and they were anti-domestic in their architectural connection to the nation-state and classical traditions. Furthermore, most of the period rooms installed in art museums were assigned lesser importance being positioned off the main museum route or not displaying significant art works or masterpieces.

display method was “antiquarian sentimentality,” and while a certain level of nostalgia is undeniably involved, visitors to the Philadelphia Museum ranked period rooms as their favorite type of exhibit.⁵⁵

Numerous other critics of American art museums in the twentieth century urged museums to adopt period rooms in their exhibition programs. Lee Simonson suggested American art museums should create rooms devoted to a specific style or period that combined furniture, ceramics, painting, and sculpture from that style or period.⁵⁶ Simonson’s plan placed these rooms in skyscrapers where visitors could move more easily to the desired art works they wished to view, and he hoped this accessibility would combat museum fatigue and visitor boredom. Forbes Watson, editor of *the Arts* and close friend of Whitney and Force, argued period rooms would help visitors identify with beauty in a tangible way. Most museums, by installing row after row of paintings, disconnected art from the everyday experience.⁵⁷ Watson suggested that integrating the high and low arts through period rooms was the best way to educate visitors about beauty and improve the public’s taste

⁵⁵ Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., “Atmosphere Versus Art,” *Atlantic Monthly* 146 (August 1930): 171-177; Philadelphia Museum of Art, “Report of a Survey of Visitors to the Museum in Its First Year” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 25, no. 130 (Dec., 1929): 3-11. Period rooms were ranked first or second by men and women visitors to the Philadelphia Museum when asked what was their favorite exhibition. Certainly this survey occurs a few years before the Whitney Museum was opened, and it may mainly speak to the populace in Philadelphia, but given the installation of period rooms elsewhere around the country they were a well received display style.

⁵⁶ Lee Simonson, “Skyscrapers for Art Museums,” *The American Mercury* (August 1927), 402. Simonson did not use the term period room, but that is what he described in his article.

⁵⁷ Forbes Watson, “The Art Museum and the American Scene,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1, no. 4 (Winter, 1941-1942), 5-10. Watson argues that art museums whether they recognize it or not are primarily concerned with the interior; therefore, they must deal with the contextualization of art.

The Whitney Museum of American Art followed in this discourse about museum design, incorporating a domestic display that mixed decorative and fine arts. However, Whitney and Force did not install period rooms, preferring an eclectic mix of decorative arts and furniture from different time periods. They were trying to provide context for American art by situating it in an American home, producing a total environment that best represented American art.⁵⁸ The entire Whitney Museum could be viewed as a period room for contemporary styles, since it exhibited contemporary American art and utilized contemporary interior decoration. Whitney and Force tried to decrease the formality of their art museum and the distance between visitors and art. There was no “forbidding cord” separating the visitor from the decorative arts or high art; people could sit on the furniture. Whitney and Force’s use of the domestic in the Museum’s design relied on images of the home as comfortable, intimate, and welcoming. These images were produced by late nineteenth century and early twentieth century visions of the home as a comforting refuge from the public realm. However, it is important to realize that the Whitney Museum’s resemblance to a middle class home may have still excluded working class visitors, making them feel uncomfortable in what remained a setting far above their pay grade.

Overall, visitors not only recognized the Museum’s decorative nature, but they also identified with its evocation of a private residence. “There is a comfortable and intimate atmosphere about the place; one feels at home there and free to look at the pictures and

⁵⁸ For a discussion of Isabella Stewart Gardner and Alice Pike Barney’s art institutions that functioned like *gesamtkunstwerk* or total environments where art and decor worked together harmoniously, see Wanda Corn, “Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America,” in *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Matronage and Patronage* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997).

sculptures as household objects rather than museum specimens,” commented Bryson Burroughs.⁵⁹ Henry McBride wrote “[t]he installation is rich....There is a comfortable feeling...about the rooms that will no doubt aid many people to trust the pictures....”⁶⁰ These reviewers testified to Whitney and Force’s success in making American art approachable by the way it was displayed. However, Burroughs’ comment indicates that the Whitney Museum’s total environment may have worked too well. Burroughs meant to congratulate the Whitney Museum for not presenting mindless rows of “museum specimens.” But he effectively undermined the paintings and sculptures in the Museum’s collection by suggesting they were not representative enough to be “specimens,” rather they were ornaments not belonging in a museum.

The Whitney Museum as Personal

The conflation of the domestic interior with women linked the Whitney Museum with the personalities of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force, which subsequently created the perception that the Museum’s decor was a result of Whitney and Force’s personal taste rather than their professional judgement.⁶¹ Helen Appleton Read noted that the galleries were “personal solutions of the problems of installation,” while Allene Talmey wrote, “a personalized museum, it [the Whitney Museum] is full of comfortable, non-institutional galleries, and the person behind it is Juliana Force. Her own strong domestic strain runs

⁵⁹ Bryson Burroughs, “The Whitney museum of American Art,” *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 27, no. 2 (February 1932), 42.

⁶⁰ McBride, “Opening of the Whitney,” 12.

⁶¹ Hankins, 178.

through the place....”⁶² These writers identified the Whitney Museum as a personal “non-institutional” museum, which in many ways was exactly what Whitney and Force intended by designing an informal museum. “People talk out loud at the Whitney.”⁶³

These critiques exemplify the interior design tenet of linking home decor with the personality of the female resident, who was assumed to have done the decorating. The home interior became a way to convey self expression, and writers on the topic suggested one could learn everything about a person by the way she decorated her home. Color, furniture style and placement, light, and architectural details were manipulated to create this self expression. Emily Post argued, “[t]he house that does not express the individuality of its owner is like a dress shown on a wax figure. It may be a beautiful dress--may be a beautiful house--but neither is animated by a living personality.” Furthermore, “*your house*, to be perfect, must delight and express *not your decorator, but you*.”⁶⁴ The conflation of the interior with women was not a new concept as scholar Beverly Gordon points out; it began with the industrial age and sprang from the strict gender role women were given inside the home.⁶⁵ However, this was a reconfiguration of Victorian domesticity around taste, charm,

⁶² Read, “The Whitney Museum,”; Talmey, “Whitney Museum of American Art.”

⁶³ Talmey, “Whitney Museum of American Art.”

⁶⁴ Post, *The Personality*, 3, 201.

⁶⁵ Beverly Gordon, “Woman’s Domestic Body: the Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 4 (1996): 281-301.

and self expression, not morality as evidenced by the use of the word personality not character.⁶⁶

Force's apartment on the fifth floor of the Museum contributed to the connection



Figure 2.11 Whitney Museum, Force's Apartment ca. 1940.
Photograph by Hans van Ness

between the Museum and the personalities of its founders. Force's apartment was photographed and written about in magazines, including *House and Garden*, *Town and Country*, *Arts and Decoration*, and *Vogue*.⁶⁷

Mary Fanton Roberts in *Arts and Decoration* made the connection

between Force and her apartment very

clear: "the arrangement of such an apartment becomes automatically the autobiography of the owner. Even if you have never seen Mrs. Force, these rooms give you an impression of her varied interests, her dramatic temperament...." Many articles also commented on the resemblance between the decoration of Force's apartment and the design of the Whitney Museum, although they did notice the more modern nature of the Museum. Ultimately, the decoration of the Whitney Museum by Force and Whitney, the location of Force's apartment

⁶⁶ Hankins, 176.

⁶⁷ Hankins, 174.

on the fifth floor, and the conflation of women and the interior created the perception of the Museum as highly personal.

David Carrier notes that this connection between museum and founder is a common phenomenon of private museums where the collection is highly personal and its display resembles a domestic setting.⁶⁸ Carrier argues that this connection allows the visitor to imagine him or herself as the “proud possessor” of the collection, thus, identifying the visitor with the collector of the art works displayed. As Anne Higonnet writes, “every visitor becomes for a brief moment the founder of the museum, the mistress or master of the house,” thus constantly creating a connection between the museum and its founder.⁶⁹ At the Whitney Museum this connection was created twice between Whitney and the Museum, and Force and the Museum. By 1940, the connection had solidified to the point where writer Allene Talmey could state “Mrs. Force and the Whitney Museum are synonymous.”⁷⁰

Evelyn Hankins argues that the perception of the Whitney Museum as personal, and its link to Whitney and Force, lessened the professionalism and authority of the Museum.⁷¹ The gender of Whitney and Force preconditioned their patronage to skepticism and criticism that diminished their actions. The decoration of the Whitney Museum like a home exacerbated this commentary due to the home’s conscious and subconscious connections

⁶⁸ David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 124-125. Carrier discusses this occurrence in relation to Isabella Stewart Gardner and her art museum.

⁶⁹ Anne Higonnet, “Private Museums,” 83.

⁷⁰ Read, “The Whitney Museum”; Talmey, “Whitney Museum of American Art.”

⁷¹ Hankins, 166, 178.

with subjectivity, amateurism, and intimacy. The decorative arrangement of the art works displayed undermined their status as art, while the perception of the Museum as highly personal undermined the museum's authority to display art. Consequently, the Whitney Museum lacked the "critical distance and objectivity needed to confirm the Whitney Museum's institutional status."⁷²

Criticism and its Impact: A Conservative and Uncritical Museum

A short article by Jane Cobb in *the New York Times* from 1939 best expresses the adverse affect of the Whitney Museum's display style. Cobb writes:

The museum is full of these contented souls, wandering around in their new Fall clothes, staring happily at the nice assortment of flowers, fruit, nudes, Middle Western scenery and social consciousness arranged on the walls. They are almost as much at home there as the unselfconsciously shabby artists who have obviously been looking at pictures all Summer. The museum itself has been all fixed up. It is resplendent with new paint, a new staircase, several new galleries and incandescent and fluorescent lights. Substantial-looking ladies move around from gallery to gallery, looking at the wall paint, exclaiming in soft delight : 'oh, I like that pink!' This annoys the artists a little, but it must please the management immeasurably.⁷³

⁷² Ibid., 178.

⁷³ Jane Cobb, "Living and Leisure," *The New York Times* September 17, 1939.



Figure 2.12 Cartoon from Jane Cobb's "Living and Leisure," 1939.

Cobb's critique reveals several important impressions about the Whitney Museum. First it suggests that artists were very comfortable in the Museum's galleries, which was a goal of Force and Whitney through their artist-first ideal. Secondly, Cobb suggests that the galleries' decor was distracting; while Cobb does discuss the art shown at the Whitney, it is given a cursory treatment and the decor is described in more detail. Furthermore, she points out that other visitors, such as the "substantial looking ladies," found the decor more interesting than the art. Finally, Cobb implies somewhat flippantly that the management, meaning Force, would be more pleased with praise of the decor than appreciation of the art. This point is emphasized by the accompanying cartoon that shows a well dressed woman exclaiming over a curtain.

Cobb's article, along with Talmey's piece in *Vogue*, and Stettheimer's painting offer three of the most pointed critiques of the Whitney Museum, commenting on its decorative nature and domestic space. These three critiques occurred quickly in succession with Cobb writing in 1939, Talmey in 1940, and Stettheimer painting in 1942; the intensified nature of criticism at this time is not coincidental. Beginning in 1937 the Whitney Museum exhibited several retrospective shows, including *New York Realists, 1900-1914* and *A Century of American Landscape Painting, 1800-1900* along with several memorial exhibitions for Gaston Lachaise, Charles Demuth, William J. Glackens, and Allen Tucker. Critics dismissed these shows as too historical and highly conservative. The Whitney Museum seemed no longer to be boosting contemporary art; which led many visitors, artists, and critics to label the Whitney Museum as conservative.⁷⁴ Anita Brenner commented that the paintings in the New York Realist show were ringed with a "cloud of futility" and subtitled her review "Dust Gathers at the Whitney Museum." Artist Jacob Kainen said in an interview "the Whitney was conservative in retrospect....it was a middle-of-the-road place that always picked a few that were more advanced...."⁷⁵

Berman argues Force was increasingly growing out of touch with younger artists, mis-understanding their motives and political affiliations.⁷⁶ Force failed to recognize "the impact of the various strains of European modernism on vanguard American artists," instead

⁷⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 395.

⁷⁵ Berman, *Rebels on*, 395-396. Anita Brenner, "New York Painters and English Architects: Dust Gathers at the Whitney Museum--A Superb Show of Modern Housing," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* February 14, 1937.

⁷⁶ Berman, *Rebels on*, 395.

promoting realism and Regionalism, which had less support from the New York art world.⁷⁷ The perceived conservativeness of the Museum culminated in 1938 when The Ten, an artist group comprised of expressionists who lacked gallery representation, staged an exhibit coinciding with the Whitney Museum annual, titling the show “The Ten Whitney Dissenters.”⁷⁸ The group intended to rebuff the Whitney for its conservative habits even though several of its members had exhibited in previous Whitney annuals. Ilya Bolotowsky, a member of the group, even had a work in the 1938 exhibition.

Talmey summed up these criticisms succinctly. “Those who now despise the Museum and its management say that it is too pretty, and feminine, and manicured; that it is too biased; that the Museum does not have the same old rebellious spirit, the same energy....”⁷⁹ Talmey’s statement reveals the connection between the Museum’s display and the perception of it as falling behind the times; during these years the Whitney Museum was not just questioned, but labeled as conservative. The renovation of the Whitney Museum in 1939, which added four new galleries and a new lighting system, was widely publicized and increased the public’s awareness of the Museum’s domesticity. Talmey’s article discussed the changes and *The Cathedrals of Art* depicted the Museum as a decorative space, lacking “modern” art.⁸⁰ Cobb’s article takes this criticism further, almost hinting that the Museum’s management was not even interested in art.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 396.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 407.

⁷⁹ Talmey, “The Whitney Museum of American Art.”

⁸⁰ Berman, *Rebels on*, 413.

The article by Cobb also raised concerns about feminine taste. The description of the female visitors and cartoon showing one exclaiming over a curtain hints at the consumerist nature of some of the Whitney Museum's activities, namely the sale of art works from its biennial and annual exhibitions. The biennial exhibitions began in 1932 with works from the American Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers, an artist organization. The first show focused on paintings, while the second exhibited sculpture.⁸¹ The biennials continued until 1937 when they were changed to one show every year. Many museums held annual exhibitions, but they were juried and awarded prizes. The Whitney biennials did neither, sending out invitations to artists and allowing them to select the works exhibited. A purchase fund was established to buy works from each show.⁸² The decision to allow artists to select their own works clearly demonstrates Force and Whitney's faith in artists and respect for their discretion; however, critics particularly condemned this practice, saying it allowed too much variety in style and quality. Others claimed the artists had exploited the Whitney Museum's generosity, sending works they were desperate to sell, but the policy continued until 1940.

By selling works of art, the Whitney Museum continued to work as an art gallery, brokering deals between artist and consumer as part of influencing the art market. Significantly, the Whitney Museum accepted no commission for these sales, but asked artists to put low prices on their canvases. A salesperson was hired for this purpose, and the museum advertised the sales in the exhibit catalogue and listed the addresses of the artists in

⁸¹ Whitney Museum of American Art, *First Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, November 22, 1932 to January 5, 1933 (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1932).

⁸² This figure was around \$20,000, see Berman, *Rebels on*.

the back to facilitate sales.⁸³ Force commented, “I want above all to have work sold from this museum.”⁸⁴ This activity must be viewed in light of the artist-first policy; Whitney and Force were trying to help artists make a living. Thus, in decorating the Whitney Museum like a middle class home, Whitney and Force were also trying to attract art buyers who might be more prone to purchase American art when shown how to display it in their own homes. The domestic aura of the Whitney Museum was intended to make visitors connect with American art, but perhaps it intended visitors to connect with the art to such an extent they might buy it.

The use of the domestic in sales display was nothing new; department stores commonly decorated their stores like lavish homes and sold art works. Wanamaker’s New York store even had a twenty-two room home built within it called the House Palatial. Museums and department stores both developed in urban centers at roughly the same time in the second half of the nineteenth century and provided “selective concentrations of merchandise.”⁸⁵ However, the Whitney Museum’s decorative galleries resembled department store displays more than other art institutions. The cartoon included by Cobb could easily be mistaken for a depiction of a department store with the woman attempting to buy new curtains.

⁸³ Whitney Museum, *First Biennial Exhibition*, 14, 75-79.

⁸⁴ Berman, *Rebels on*, 394.

⁸⁵ Neil Harris, “Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence,” in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian M.G. Quimby (New York: WW Norton and Co, 1978), 150.

Additionally, the fact that Cobb speaks about the Museum's visitors as women is revealing. Women were the primary target for sales aside, from other museums, because they were perceived to be the primary consumers in twentieth century society, and home decoration was assumed to be the responsibility of the female homemaker.⁸⁶ According to Sparke, the culture of consumption is largely discussed in feminine terms, highlighting this perception, and taste became an important concept increasingly linked to feminine consumption within the public sphere of the department store. Taste, however, was trivialized by sales manuals and cultural commentators, such as Thorstein Velben, as a passive phenomenon occurring at the time of attraction to an object; it was neither an individualized response nor an active choice by the female consumer because it was a reaction to the display created by a designer (often thought of as male).⁸⁷

Art museums participated in the influencing of taste by displaying what is considered aesthetically important by art historians and critics. In fact, many art museums were founded with the goal of influencing the design of material goods and improving taste by establishing what is beautiful and worth buying. As taste became increasingly linked to the feminine in the twentieth century, women become a primary audience for art museums. Robert Harshe put it bluntly, "it is in general the female of the species who responds....with more leisure than her husband can afford....the furnishings of her home, its setting, her gowns--all reflect

⁸⁶ Sparke, 88-89; Geraldine Sartain, "Do the Women own America?" *The American Mercury* LIII, no. 215 (November 1941): 527-533.

⁸⁷ Sparke, 90-94.

the knowledge of color harmony and line gained through the museum....”⁸⁸ Whitney and Force were aware of this connection as is suggested by the Whitney Studio Club slogan “What is home without a modern picture?”⁸⁹ The Whitney Museum sought to influence taste in order to procure sales for artists, but they took this goal one step further by providing the locale for the sale of art.

Theoretically, museums always represent the marketplace by displaying material goods and as Susan Stewart argues the nature of collections emphasizes the scene of acquisition; in other words collections place more importance on consumption than production.⁹⁰ However, museums in the late Gilded Age tried to hide their consumerist associations in an attempt to distinguish their museums from earlier versions of museums, which existed for entertainment. Art museums in particular try to hide their consumerist connections in order to promote the spiritual quality of art that must function above market relations.⁹¹ The view of art as uplifting combined with the artist genius myth work to hide the commercial value of art. Even though the view of art as morally inspiring decreased during the twentieth century, it was intended to provide a subjective experience, which still

⁸⁸ Robert Harshe, “The Museum and the American Art Renaissance,” *Creative Art* (1931), 382.

⁸⁹ Lloyd Goodrich and John I.H. Baur, *American Art of Our Century* (New York: the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1961), 13.

⁹⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 156-159.

⁹¹For discussions of the relationship between money and art, see Gwendolyn Owens, “Hidden Histories: Robert Henri’s Female Students and the Market for American Art,” in *American Women Modernists: the Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945*, ed. Marian Wardle (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 147; and Sherman E. Lee, ed., *The American Assembly on Understanding Art Museums* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975).

necessitated disassociation from the market. Through the sale of art, the Whitney Museum literally brought the marketplace into the Museum further connecting it to consumerism.

The Whitney Museum's connection to consumerism through the sale of art from its biennial and annual exhibitions reinforced perceptions of the Museum as feminine because the link between women and consumerism was so strong during the early to mid-twentieth century. The mixture of decorative arts with fine arts in the display style used by Whitney and Force not only linked the Museum to domesticity but also to department stores, which used similar merchandising techniques. Aside from Cobb's pointed critique, the sale of art did not receive overt criticism from artists or art critics. The only other reference to this policy seems to be Robert Harshe's offhand remark that "[n]early all American museums buy American art; a number are unafraid of being termed commercial and sell it."⁹²

Instead, the Whitney biennials and annuals were criticized for being too diverse, showing a variety of artists and styles that failed to provide critical judgement.⁹³ This diversity was part of the Museum's effort to provide a "comprehensive" showing of what was happening in the American art world and stemmed from the policy allowing artists to select the art work sent to the exhibition. Forbes Watson, Henry McBride, and Henry Geldzahler were particularly opposed to this policy.⁹⁴ Geldzahler was a curator at the Metropolitan

⁹² Harshe, "The Museum and the American," 386.

⁹³ Not all art critics opposed the comprehensive goal of the Whitney biennials and annuals; some suggested it showed the individuality of American artists, see Margaret Breuning, "Art in New York," *Parnassus* 9, no. 7 (1937): 22-28; and Margareta M. Salinger, "This Year's Yield," *Parnassus* 5, no. 4 (1933): 23-26.

⁹⁴ Juliana Force, "Foreward," in *First Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, November 22, 1932 to January 5, 1933, Whitney Museum of American Art (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1932), 5.

Museum of Art, and he suggested that the Whitney Museum failed to be discriminatory. At the Whitney annuals, he said “the viewer was thrown into the healthful turmoil of doing what some consider the museum’s job--of deciding, comparing, rejecting, and accepting....”⁹⁵ It is important to remember, however, that viewer interpretation was very important to Force; she wanted visitors to confront a work of art without interference.⁹⁶

Historians writing about the Whitney Museum have also argued the diversity of the Whitney annuals failed to be critical enough. Berman writes that due to the “catholicity of taste....everything was accorded the same weight,” while Bruce Lineker argues “the director and staff down-played their curatorial function in the exhibition process. Outside of inviting artists to participate, the staff wished to claim an uncritical involvement.”⁹⁷ Force did wish to minimize interference with the visitor’s interpretation as discussed earlier and, thus, the Museum did not publish a list of its purchases until after the exhibition closed.⁹⁸ However, these statements overshadow the very significant use of critical judgement involved in inviting artists to show work at the biennials and annuals and the discrimination involved in choosing works of art for purchase and later exhibition in the Museum’s permanent collection. Both of these actions involved Force and the Museum staff in selecting who and

⁹⁵ Henry Geldzahler, *New York Painting and Sculpture, 1940-1970*, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969), 25; Berman, *Rebels on*, 284-285.

⁹⁶ Berman, *Rebels on*, 7; Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, “I believe in American Art,” [ca. 1931], 8a, Microfilm 2372, Whitney Museum of American Art, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers 1851-1975, SIAAAA.

⁹⁷ Berman, *Rebels on*, 284; Bruce Lineker, “Introduction,” *The Annual and Biennial Exhibition Record of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1918-1989* (Boston: Sound View Press, 1991), 19.

⁹⁸ Lineker, 18.

what was considered important within the American art world; therefore, in reality, not everything was accorded the same weight. Furthermore, Lineker points out that the biennials and annuals often showed new talent along side older artists who had been members of the Whitney Studio Club, such as Reginald Marsh, Edward Hopper, and John Sloan.⁹⁹ In effect, this inclusion created a specific vision of art history, declaring these artist's contemporary relevance and legitimizing Whitney and Force's early patronage. The inclusion of older artists with new talent also allowed for comparison that could highlight innovation and progression of styles.

Ultimately, the commentary about the Museum's lack of critical evaluation was part of the perception of the Museum as feminine and personal, lacking in authority and objectivity. As women, Whitney and Force were denied the ability to judge and select; as women consuming objects to create an art collection their taste was reactionary and passive. The domestic nature of the Whitney Museum and its link to consumerism redoubled these connections, creating views of the Museum as personal, feminine, decorative, conservative, and uncritical. Hankins argues these perceptions had drastic consequences for the Whitney Museum, causing its art collection to be devalued and excluded from the modern art canon. Art history texts, museums, and classes promote "the canon of modern art that Alfred Barr so meticulously outlined" at the Museum of Modern Art, while "the Whitney's prewar American art still is not at home in this modern narrative."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Lineker, 18.

¹⁰⁰ Hankins, 185. Hankins means before World War II.

CHAPTER THREE

The Whitney Museum and Modernism

Critical perceptions of the Whitney Museum as too personal, feminine, and conservative continued into the second half of the twentieth century. Two articles published in *Art News* in 1980 reviewing the history of the Whitney Museum of American Art, “A Pictorial History of the Whitney Museum” by Avis Berman and “Mrs. Whitney’s ‘very interesting scheme’ at 50” by James R. Mellow, suggest that these perceptions had long term consequences. Berman wrote that the Whitney Museum’s historical significance lay not in its collection, but rather in the “sturdy hand it lent to all those young painters and sculptors with nowhere else to turn.”¹ Mellow also called into question the Museum’s collection; the assemblage “more often met the requirements of geography rather than quality,” and many of the exhibitions simply “seemed to be marking time and filling space.”² In the eyes of many critics and art historians the Museum’s collection of realist art was excluded from the modern art canon.

Evelyn Hankins attributes the exclusion of the Whitney Museum’s collection to the Museum’s failure to attain institutional status because of its connections to the personal and the feminine.³ While Hankins correctly notes the devaluation of the collection’s significance and the Museum’s feminine nature, she fails to delve into the underlying discourse of

¹ Avis Berman, “A Pictorial History of the Whitney Museum,” *Art News* (May 1980), 54.

² James R. Mellow, “Mrs. Whitney’s ‘very interesting scheme’ at 50,” *Art News* (May 1980), 51.

³ Evelyn Hankins, “En/Gendering the Whitney’s Collection of American Art,” in *Acts of Possession*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

Modernism in twentieth century America that also denigrated the feminine and excluded realism from art historical narratives. It is this discourse that created a feminine other to masculine art, and Modernism's hegemony in art history relegated the Whitney Museum's collection to the margins. Hankins does not consider Modernism's impact on the Museum, instead focusing on the Museum's feminizing display style as the catalyst for the exclusion of the art collection from the modern art canon. Art historian Janet Wolff does discuss Modernism's relation to the Whitney Museum, exposing how the discourse worked to exclude realist art.⁴ While Wolff considers Modernism, she looks only at it in relation to the collection, failing to connect Modernism's implications for the Museum's structure and display style. This chapter will seek to synthesize Wolff and Hankins' arguments, exploring the Modernist discourse's conflicted relationship with the Whitney Museum and its impact on the collection of predominantly realist art.

Modernism played a key role in undermining the Whitney Museum's institutional status from inception through the 1980's when Mellow and Berman were writing. Modernism influenced art critics' perception of the Museum: belittling Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force's patronage; rejecting the Museum's domestic and feminine architectural program; and identifying the Museum's realist art as the antithesis to modern art because of its connection to kitsch. The suppression of the feminine in art and architecture in favor of masculine abstraction and self-expression encouraged the rejection of the Whitney

⁴ Janet Wolff, "Women at the Whitney, 1910-1930: Feminism/Sociology/Aesthetics," in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 483-497.

Museum of American Art. Whitney and Force were not ignorant of the Modernist discourse, nor were they simply subjugated by it; rather, they engaged with Modernism by upholding central tenets of the discourse, such as the value of innovation and masculinity. Modernist values are seen by the Museum's consistent exhibition of young, innovative artists and art works with highly masculine overtones in terms of their content and painting style.

However, Whitney and Force would not relinquish realism for a highly selective Modernist canon nor abandon their belief in an informal art museum created through domestic display. They sought inclusivity and rejected elitism in ways that mirrored their rebellion against gender and class ideology. Whitney and Force worked to stake their claim as female cultural brokers in a twentieth century male art world, which now shunned Victorian culture as overly feminine. The Whitney Museum embodied their claim; it functioned as a liminal space, juxtaposing public and private as well as masculine and feminine, Modernism and conservatism, abstraction and realism, mass culture and high art, and elitism and inclusivity.

Modernism

In order to understand how Whitney and Force engaged with the Modernist discourse, it is important to first define and explicate Modernist ideals. Modernism is an aesthetic ideology that developed in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and continued into the mid twentieth century.⁵ Although it represents a diverse range of artistic styles that developed in Europe and America, Modernism has several defining characteristics. Modernism has a self-referential, autonomous stance in opposition to the bourgeois everyday

⁵ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 13.

and mimetic representation, which means that the discourse rejected naturalistic realism.⁶ Modernist movements often sought to disrupt the status-quo politically and socially, but Modernism's proclaimed autonomy also encouraged the exploration of its own medium, leading to an art for arts' sake mentality and an often obsessive experimentation with form, color, and space.⁷

Modernism as a theory can be differentiated from artists who identified themselves as modern and advocated the new as a repudiation of the past.⁸ These artistic movements were and still are labeled as avant-garde, suggesting their advanced stylistic expression. Many modern artists used and accepted Modernist ideas without fully adopting the discourse. Modernism was appropriated in the late 1930's by art historians as the dominant narrative of modern Western art. This narrative rewrote European and American art since the 1870's to exclude those who did not meet the formalistic qualities of abstraction. Thus, Modernism aesthetically conflicted with the Whitney Museum; and the Modernist art historical narrative, which achieved hegemony in the 1950's, devalued the significance of the Whitney Museum's collection of realist art.

⁶ For a discussion of Modernist art's autonomy, see Mark A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Clement Greenberg, "Formalism," *New Literary History* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 171-175; Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 53-54; Felski, 14-23. Felski suggests that differences existed between European Modernism and American Modernism. American Modernism was often less connected with specific political ideologies, while both European and American Modernism's emphasis on autonomy allowed it to be co-opted by diverse political positions or even de-politicized.

⁸ William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff, *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), xix; Felski, 13.

Modernism is further characterized by a strong masculine subtext. Scholars such as Carol Duncan, Griselda Pollock, and Andrea Huyssen have all noted the often severe suppression of the feminine within Modernism through the association of femininity with non-art; the reduction of women to passive, sexualized types in male artists' works; and the limitation of women's self-expression.⁹ Duncan argues that the assertion of male virility in much late nineteenth and early twentieth century art work resulted from a masculinity crisis in reaction to women's expanding public roles.¹⁰ Specifically, in the United States, women's perceived role as "cultural custodians" in the Victorian era led men to re-assert their control over culture, reclaiming the arts as a masculine endeavor.¹¹ These Modernists rejected Victorian respectability, refinement, and gentility, connecting these elements to femininity.¹² The repudiation of the National Academy of Design and traditional forms of art by avant-

⁹ Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting," *Artforum* (December 1973); Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard ed.s (New York: HarperCollins, 1992): 245-267; Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*.

¹⁰ Pollock, "Modernity," 247; Duncan, "Virility and Domination," 293-302. Duncan and Pollock argue the assertion of male virility is seen in male artist's depictions of women, especially the nude. These paintings show women in male dominated social spaces, such as bars, restaurants, and brothels where lower class women are seen as prostitutes, dancers, and entertainers. The women in these works are represented as powerless, passive, and often sexually subjugated. The figure of woman became a sign for modern men's sexuality and the danger of female sexuality.

¹¹ Kathleen McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). McCarthy disabuses this myth, showing the more limited role women actually played in cultural patronage from 1830-1930.

¹² Kristen Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 166. Socially, the repudiation of Victorian culture was seen by Theodore Roosevelt's advocacy of the strenuous life, and it was strengthened by American imperialism and nationalism, which celebrated a "cultural masculinism."

garde artists was a gendered activity because of the perceived alliance between Victorian culture and femininity.¹³

The virile masculinity also evident in realist art works, such as Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream*, 1899, and Ashcan School paintings such as Bellows' *Both Members of This Club*, 1909, exemplify the rejection of stultifying, lifeless subject matter, such as classical nudes or history paintings, for vigorous, energetic content expressive of the individual artist.¹⁴ Modernist art often deals with the public sphere, male sporting activities, and changes brought on by a modernizing urbanity, such as new technology and crowded street-life. Modernism celebrated the experimental, self-conscious, and ironic, while it consistently defined itself through a strategy of exclusion.¹⁵ The feminine and the domestic was posited as the antithesis to Modernism. Art historian Christopher Reed points out that the very idea of the avant-garde, which is a military term meaning advanced guard, implies a state of being away from the home.¹⁶ The domestic, consequently, is positioned as the "antipode to high

¹³ For the perceptions of the alliance between women and Victorian culture, see "The Uncultured Sex," *Independent* 67 (November 1909): 1099-1100; Earl Barnes, "The Feminizing of Culture," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1912): 770-776; Ramsay Traquair, "Women and Civilization," *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 1923): 289-296.

¹⁴ Bellows and Homer while falling within much of the Modernist discourse, especially with regards to masculine content, were excluded from the Modernist art historical narrative because of their realist styles.

¹⁵ Felski, 24.

¹⁶ Christopher Reed, *Not At Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 7. Reed discusses prominent Modernist artists, writers, architects, and intellectuals who exemplified this suppression, including Baudelaire, Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, Walter Benjamin, and Julius Meier-Graefe.

art. Ultimately, in the eyes of the avant-garde, being undomestic came to serve as a guarantee of being art.”¹⁷

Modernism’s obsession with self-expression and autonomy encouraged artists to renounce representational form for abstraction.¹⁸ This element had significant gender repercussions, since Modernism promoted male experience of life as the only real or true expression. Women could express only their womanliness, while men possessed the creativity and individuality for true self-expression.¹⁹ If women artists showed “un-feminine” qualities in their art, such as vigorous brushstrokes or vitality, they were characterized as masculine; thus, Modernism continually ascribed weak, emotional, and lifeless characteristics to the feminine.²⁰ Robert Henri epitomized this sentiment in the advice he gave his art students: “Be a man first, be an artist later.”²¹ The limitations assumed and imposed on women’s expression, confining it to femininity, created a type of “othering” where men, reason, and Modernism were aligned against women, subjectivity, irrationality,

¹⁷ Reed, 7-17.

¹⁸ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, “The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis,” *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1978), 34. For additional information on Modernism and self-expression, see Micael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Swinth, 165-168; Lois Palken Rudnick, “Modernizing Women: The New Woman and American Modernism,” in *American Women Modernists: the Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945*, ed. Marian Wardle (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 165. Swinth argues Modernists borrowed from modern psychology and Darwinian theories that perceived the self as gendered. She uses Georgia O’Keeffe’s career as an example of this limitation. Critics and art historians commonly labeled her art as true feminine expression.

²⁰ Swinth, 191-192. Swinth also points out the division between male and female self-expression was greatly based on views of sexuality. Women were seen as having an organic sexuality that was constantly expressed in their portrayals of selfhood because they could never quite consciously escape it. Men on the other hand could use sexuality to explore selfhood and the sexualized woman became a symbol for Modernism.

²¹ Robert Henri quoted in Swinth, 170.

and nature.²² This “othering” inhibited conceptions of female identity and agency in the art world.

The opposition between masculine and feminine in the Modernist discourse also centered around the opposition between high art and mass culture.²³ One of the best examples of this opposition is art historian and critic Clement Greenberg’s essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” published in 1939 in the *Partisan Review*. In this essay, Greenberg argues that to have an avant-garde necessitates a “rear-garde,” which he calls kitsch and identifies as commercial, popular art and literature.²⁴ According to Greenberg, kitsch arises from the need of an increasingly literate urban mass for a form of leisure and cultural diversion; kitsch is “mechanical....vicarious experience and faked sensations....Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times.”²⁵ Ultimately, Greenberg positions high art as the antithesis to kitsch, removing art from mass culture and marking its elitism.²⁶

The opposition between art and kitsch further complicated and increased Modernism’s opposition to the feminine because of the connections between women and

²² Felski, 5-7.

²³ Huyssen, viii, 56. Huyssen labels the hostility between high art and mass culture as “the Great Divide” and suggests it reached prominence at the end of the nineteenth century and again following World War II. The opposition to mass culture arose from Modernist repudiation of bourgeois culture. Mass culture was seen as the tool of the bourgeoisie class to subordinate the proletariat. “The Great Divide” was prominent during these two period because of the advent of mass culture at the end of the nineteenth century with the increase in advertising and consumerism and after World War II because of totalitarian regime’s use of mass culture as a tool in domination.

²⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Clement Greenberg: the Collected Essays and Criticism* ed. by John O’Brian (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1986), 11.

²⁵ Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” 12.

²⁶ Huyssen, 47.

consumerism. The feminine became synonymous with kitsch because Modernists identified women with the masses and because women were assumed to be the urban consumers in department stores.²⁷ Modernists consigned mass culture to “the discarded Victorian feminine.”²⁸ The devaluation of mass culture suggests Modernism’s fear of contamination from the “other”; thus, a clear distinction was made between what was high art and what was commercial or mass art. This distinction reveals the reasoning behind the reification of pure abstraction wherein an artist renounces everyday experience for inner expression, continually turning his attention to art’s medium and not its narrative content- Greenberg identifies this process as a search for the absolute. He designates representational art or realism with kitsch, thus marking realism as neither avant-garde nor Modernist.²⁹ Kitsch became a catchall for art not meeting the formal qualities of the search for the absolute.

Modernism’s opposition to the feminine and mass culture had significant implications for the Whitney Museum of American Art. First of all, Modernist ideals combined with gender ideology to influence art critics and their opinions of Whitney and Force as art patrons. Modernism’s denial of women’s creativity relegated women to supporters and passive actors in the art world. Art critics like Henry McBride and Allene Talmey often hailed women’s contribution to the art world; but their language belied gender assumptions

²⁷ Huyssen, 52-53; Penny Sparke, *As Long As It’s Pink: the Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 88-89; Geraldine Sartain, “Do the Women own America?” *The American Mercury* LIII, no. 215 (November 1941): 527-533.

²⁸ Swinth, 168.

²⁹ Greenberg “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” 16. Greenberg asserts that the problem with representation is that it fails to stimulate the viewer, since he or she does not need to engage cognitively to analyze symbols to arrive at the meaning of the painting, rather the viewer simply connects the image to real life.

that underestimated Whitney and Force's influence as museum founders and directors.³⁰ Just as women artists were limited to a feminine expression, women art patrons were confined to a supporting, less influential role in promoting art and artists. Women's relation to kitsch further denied their agency in the art world, since theoretically the kitsch could not be art instead it only simulated art. In this light, critiques labeling Whitney's patronage as mere play, and accusations that the Whitney Museum "is pretending to represent American art" hint at the inherent conflict between women art patrons and Modernism.³¹ Huyssen argues that the ascription of mass culture to the feminine depended on the real exclusion of women from high culture and its institutions. The criticism of Whitney and Force's patronage as charity and of little consequence to modern art was one way to marginalize their participation in high art.³²

The Modernist Art Historical Narrative

As the twentieth century progressed, Modernism solidified as a discourse, and art historians fully adopted this aesthetic to create the canon of modern art. This art historical narrative is highly selective, celebrating formal innovation and the artist who pushes farthest away from existing artistic styles.³³ Modernism was codified by art historians as a series of formally distinct styles one succeeding the other, usually beginning with Impressionism and

³⁰ Henry McBride, "Opening of the Whitney Museum," *The New York Sun*, November 21, 1931; Allene Talmey, "Whitney Museum of American Art and the One-Woman Power Behind It-Juliana Force," *Vogue*, I (February 1940).

³¹ Rosenfeld, "The Whitney Museum," *The Nation* 133, no. 3469 (1931), 732.

³² Huyssen, 62.

³³ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 108.

continuing through post-Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism, and culminating in Abstract Expressionism.³⁴ The Modernist art historical narrative is largely Euro-centric, rejecting American artists' more inclusive Modernism that encompassed realism. The narrative emphasizes the central tenets of Modernism, including self-expression, the autonomous work of art, experiment, and masculinity.³⁵ Clement Greenberg, and director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Alfred H. Barr, were instrumental in formulating the Modernist art historical narrative. Barr and Greenberg divorced Modernism from its radical political roots and favored abstract form over representation.³⁶ Barr's catalog for the 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* best established the succession of Modernists styles and advocated Parisian Modernism as the archetype for all modern art.³⁷

The Museum of Modern Art, founded in 1929, promoted the Modernist historical narrative through its display and architecture. Between 1932 and 1939 MoMA was located in a nineteenth century townhouse at Eleven West Fifty-Third Street. Barr made every effort to erase the building's domestic past by hiding or removing the Victorian decorative elements

³⁴ Huyssen, 56-57. This view of art history is very Hegelian in conception with styles succeeding one another in response to internal dialectics. Huyssen argues the ascendancy of Modernism as historical narrative from the heterogeneity of modernity was a result of the collusion between Modernism and modernization. Basically, Modernism appears as an aesthetic version of modernization.

³⁵ Erika Doss, "Complicating Modernism: Issues of Liberation and Constraint among the Women Art Students of Robert Henri," in *American Women Modernists: the Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945*, ed. Marian Wardle (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 129. Doss argues that the Ashcan School's encouragement of diversity in viewpoint is overshadowed by Barr and Greenberg's more authoritative Modernism, which sought to create a lineage for the New York School that did not include realism.

³⁶ Scott and Rutkoff, 177.

³⁷ Alfred H. Barr, "Cubism and Abstract Art: Introduction," in *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.*, ed.s Irving Sandler and Amy Newman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 1986): 84-91; Griselda Pollock, "Modernity," 245; Wolff, 487; Scott and Rutkoff, 168.

in the interior, such as ornamental moldings and columns. Following Modernist Architectural principles, Barr adopted the International Style for the Museum's decor, using little ornament, simple lines, and white walls.³⁸ Architectural Modernists urged the complete abandonment of the feminized interior, which they identified with Victorian domesticity and its stuffy, overly decorated, highly ornamental interiors. Architects like Le Corbusier urged a

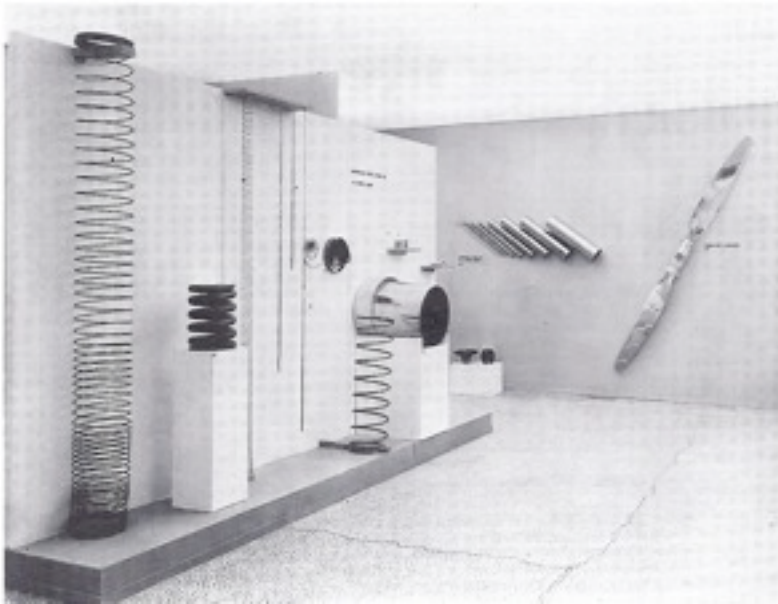


Figure 3.1 Museum of Modern Art, *Machine Art Exhibition*, 1934 Source: Hankins, 182.

rational approach to architecture and interior design that emphasized minimalism, utility, and standardization.³⁹ These design principles were intended to help architecture and interior design transcend what was “fashionable” and eliminate everyday artifacts

or the ephemeral. Barr's creation of a stripped, white exhibition space with no ornament reflected these Modernist design principles, and the “nowhere” blankness he created helped focus visitors attention on the art.

³⁸ Hankins, 181.

³⁹ Sparke, 102-107. Le Corbusier renounced the domestic and the feminine within his architecture, see Luis E. Carranza, “Le Corbusier and the Problems of Representation,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 48, no. 2 (November 1994): 70-81.

When MoMA opened its new Bauhaus inspired building in 1939, the Museum fully succeeded in creating a timeless space where visitors could logically move through the Modernist art historical narrative.⁴⁰ MoMA's display style not only utilized Architectural Modernism, but the Museum also embodied the Modernist principle of dematerialization through its installation of art in a blank space without ornament. The Museum displayed Modernist art in a progressive linear narrative from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism. The linear narrative depicts the artist's search for pure abstraction, wherein each style moves farther from representing the material world. Duncan points out that this progression is littered with images of women.⁴¹ Paintings such as Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and *Seated Bather*, Léger's *Grand Déjeuner*, Duchamp's *Bride*, and de Kooning's *Woman I* offer sexualized views of female bodies often in threatening and medusa like poses. Why are images of women so pervasive in the masculine Modernist narrative? As Duncan argues these female images actually signal the MoMA's space as male, and they specify the narrative's quest for transcendence of representational form as male.⁴² The bodies of women, thus, come to symbolize male fears and desires: "each of these works testifies to a pervasive

⁴⁰ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late," 43.

⁴¹ Duncan, "The MoMA's Hot Mamas," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard ed.s (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 348-350.

⁴² Ibid., 348-349. Duncan argues sexualized images of women imply a male spectator. For further discussion of the male gaze, see also Leo Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel," *Art News* (September 1972); Pollock, "Modernity," 261-263. Steinberg further suggests that women lack the anatomical ability to psychologically appreciate these art works.

fear of and ambivalence about woman.”⁴³ The images “add urgency to such flights to ‘higher’ realms” involved in the Modernist narrative.⁴⁴ Consequently, visitors to MoMA enact a ritual quest to overcome the material and the feminine in search of purity of form, following the Modernist art historical narrative. MoMA, thus, becomes a monument to male inner experience and its expression.

The Museum of Modern Art’s display style set the standard during the mid-twentieth century for art museums and galleries exhibiting modern art. Museum installation has historically attempted to isolate art objects from non-aesthetic meanings and from each other by increasing the space surrounding each work.⁴⁵ This process is evident from the overcrowding of the French Salon where paintings hung one on top of the other on bright red walls, to installations like MoMA’s where paintings are evenly spaced with often one art work occupying an entire wall.⁴⁶ This type of installation places the art as an object of aesthetic contemplation for the visitor’s concentrated gaze. By looking at art the visitor is supposed to achieve some form of spiritual enlightenment, in MoMA’s case transcendence of the material. To attain enlightenment the spectator must withdraw from the day-to-day world. The museum’s “neutral” design, without signifiers of the outside world or the

⁴³ Duncan, “The MoMA’s Hot Mamas,” 349. Women are connected to the material world due to women’s perceived biological grounding and relation to nature. Duncan suggests these male fears stem from a desire to escape a psychic image of woman and the earthly domain rooted in childish notions of the mother.

⁴⁴ Duncan, “The MoMA’s Hot Mamas,” 349.

⁴⁵ Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 17. An art work’s isolation is also achieved by individual lighting and eye-level hanging.

⁴⁶ For a brief discussion of installation in the French Salon, see Martha Ward, “Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions,” *The Art Bulletin* LXXIII, no. 4 (December 1991).

domestic such as ornament and extraneous furniture, encourages such inward reflection.⁴⁷

Brian O'Doherty designates this isolated gallery space the white cube.⁴⁸ He argues the white cube's timelessness suggests eternity in a way that elevates the art work shown; it elicits quietness and suspends bodily needs. The white cube is the ultimate expression of Modernism where nothing is left but an examination of the self.

Deviating from Modernism

The Museum of Modern Art's architectural program presents a clear distinction from that of the Whitney Museum of American Art. MoMA renounced ornament and domestic decor in favor of Modernist architecture and theory, while the Whitney Museum embraced a more modern feminized interior that never relinquished its domesticity. Modernism's repudiation of the feminine and the domestic conflicted with Whitney and Force's use of the domestic to display modern art. Whitney and Force designed the Whitney Museum like an American home to make the museum less formal and the art more approachable. They displayed modern art alongside decorative arts and in relation to antique and modern furniture. Ultimately, this design choice undermined the Whitney Museum's collection of art by making the Museum seem personal and feminine. Modernism's alignment of high art against conceptions of the feminine and the domestic positioned the Whitney's collection, which appeared decorative and feminized, as non-art or kitsch.

⁴⁷ Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 14-17.

⁴⁸ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

The Whitney Museum's display was not the only deviation from Modernism. As Wolff argues, the Museum's art collection, consisting primarily of realist art works, was virtually written out of the modern art narrative due to the hegemony of the Modernist discourse.⁴⁹ The Modernist art historical narrative proclaimed abstraction to be the real modern art and designated it as masculine, while realism was identified as feminine through its association with kitsch and mass culture. Regardless of the fact that men and women were realist painters and that much of American realist art ascribed to Modernist principles and had overt masculine tones, the Ashcan School, Social Realists, and Regionalists became merely peripheral narratives on the path to abstraction.⁵⁰ If these American moderns were mentioned at all, it was as a bridge between nineteenth century art and Modernism.⁵¹

A cartoon by artist Ad Reinhardt from 1946 best depicts the subjugation of realism. The drawing shows a family tree of American Modernism.⁵² The roots and the tree trunk show various European influences of American Modernism, such as Picasso, Van Gogh, and

⁴⁹ Wolff, 484.

⁵⁰ Wolff, 487-491; Doss, "Complicating Modernism," 128-132. The hegemony of the Modernist art historical narrative had real consequences for women artists who were largely dropped from the canon, labeled as amateurs, creatively stifled, and or limited to a feminized, sexual expression.

⁵¹ Wolff, 489; Matthew Baigell, *A Concise History of American Painting and Sculpture* (New York: IconEditions, 1996); Joshua C. Taylor, *The Fine Arts in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁵² Judith Zilzer, "Beyond Genealogy: American Modernism in Retrospect," *American Art* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 5.

realists' adherence to subject matter.⁵³ If this image is not enough to suggest the exclusion of realism from Modernism, an angel flies and the sun shines on the left side of the tree. The only art patrons explicitly shown are John Quinn and Hilla Rebay. While major museums are not depicted, the right side of the tree reads like an exhibition roster for the Whitney Museum and the left for the Museum of Modern Art.

The adherence of the Whitney Museum to realism throughout the 40's and 50's, even as Modernism gained hegemony, classified the Museum as conservative according to reviews and art critics who promoted the Modernist art historical narrative.⁵⁴ Clement Greenberg best represents this critical appraisal of the Whitney Museum as conservative. In a review of the Whitney's 1943 Annual, Greenberg suggested the artists exhibited were "satisfied to rework old areas," and the work to be seen at the Whitney was "fulsome or banal."⁵⁵ The only praise worthy art he found in the show were works by abstractionists: Theodore Roszak, David Smith, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and Bruce Weber.⁵⁶ Greenberg was not the only critic who labeled the Whitney Museum as conservative. Jacob Kainen, Allene Talmey, and Anita

⁵³ The cartoon also links realism with consumerism and mass culture. There are signs that read "Business as Art Patron," "Life," and "Lucky Strike" as well as a sign for the Associated American Artists. This organization marketed Social Realists and Regionalists as a middle class commodity by selling prints of important works in the 1930's. The Association also worked with corporations like the American Tobacco Company to commission artists to do their ad campaigns, see Erika Doss, "Catering to Consumerism: Associated American Artists and the Marketing of Modern Art, 1934-1958," *Winterthur Portfolio* 26 no. 2 (Summer 1991): 143-167.

⁵⁴ Anita Brenner, "New York Painters and English Architects: Dust Gathers at the Whitney Museum--A Superb Show of Modern Housing," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (February 14, 1937). Also see Chapter Two's discussion of conservatism at the Whitney Museum.

⁵⁵ Clement Greenberg, "Review of the Whitney Annual and the Exhibition *Artists for Victory*," *The Nation* (January 1943) in *Clement Greenberg: the Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 1 (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1986), 134.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Brenner all critiqued the Museum for its adherence to realism, and artists of The Ten particularly denounced the Whitney Museum through their exhibition titled “The Ten Whitney Dissenters.”⁵⁷

The Museum continued to exhibit artists like Edward Hopper, John Sloan, and Reginald Marsh along with more abstract works by Stuart Davis, William de Kooning, and Arshile Gorky in efforts to be comprehensive and inclusive.⁵⁸ This inclusivity was part of Whitney and Force’s rejection of the National Academy of Design and its elitist policies; one of the main goals of the Whitney Museum was to democratize art and patronize living American artists. “For the Whitney Museum the most important aim has been consistently to build up a collection representing the best in contemporary art, including all important tendencies and individuals, and without partiality towards any school” wrote Force in 1946.⁵⁹ The goal of inclusivity contrasted with Modernism’s selective canon and evaluation of paintings based on the qualities of the absolute, making the Whitney Museum seem not only conservative but also uncritical to art critics, especially Forbes Watson, Henry McBride, and Henry Geldzahler.

⁵⁷ Berman, *Rebels on*, 396-407; Talmey, “The Whitney Museum of American Art”; Brenner, “New York Painters and English Architects.”

⁵⁸ Bruce Lineker, “Introduction,” *The Annual and Biennial Exhibition Record of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1918-1989* (Boston: Sound View Press, 1991), 28-30; Llyod Goodrich and John I.H. Baur, *American Art of Our Century* Whitney Museum of American Art (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1961). The Whitney Museum held a retrospective for Edward Hopper in 1950, a memorial exhibition for Arshile Gorky in 1951, a John Sloan exhibition in 1952 while buying and exhibiting works by de Kooning (*Woman and Bicycle*), Mark Tobey (*Universal Field*), and Robert Motherwell (*The Red Skirt*) in 1949, 1950, and 1955.

⁵⁹ Juliana Force, “The Whitney Museum of American Art,” *Magazine of Art* (May 1946), 328.

The Whitney Museum of American Art centralized realism in its art historical narrative through its continued exhibition of important realist artists. American realists' goals of communicating with the public at large and steeping their art in the life of America, particularly New York City, closely paralleled Whitney and Force's belief in democratization of art, inclusivity, and an informal museum- goals they adopted through their relationships with Robert Henri, John Sloan, and Forbes Watson.⁶⁰ William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff attest to American realism's embracement of the everyday, arguing "New York painters rejected the temptation to create an esoteric art, divorced from shared experience and understandable only to a cult of aesthetic initiates."⁶¹ The domestic display of the Whitney Museum also represented this inclusivity through its intention to connect with visitors, making art more approachable by placing it in a comfortable, recognizable setting.⁶² In displaying more representational visual conventions, the Whitney Museum used a space situated in time and place. It did not need to eliminate signifiers of the everyday like the Museum of Modern Art because it was not endorsing an art historical narrative that tried to transcend materiality.

⁶⁰ Berman, *Rebels on*, 72-73.

⁶¹ Scott and Rutkoff, 131.

⁶² With that said, however, it is important to recognize that the Whitney Museum's domestic display did possess an element of elitism through its use of the middle class home, which might have hindered access or comfort for working class visitors. For a discussion of the visitor's reaction to a museum based on his or her class, sex, race, see Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 51-70.

Critics like Henry McBride recognized the Museum's design as particularly suited to display modern American artists.⁶³ In a review of the Demuth Memorial exhibition at the Whitney Museum, McBride noted the Museum's intimate nature and "'residence' feeling" that suited Demuth's paintings.⁶⁴ "Might it not be that the flower pictures relish their pleasant surroundings and perform well because of them?" McBride asked. "I am inclined to think that is it." McBride also pointed out that where the Museum had Demuth paintings hung on "white walls that are necessary for strictly modern pictures," the art did not work quite as well. "Possession and intimacy are necessary to a Demuth watercolor" he concluded.⁶⁵

Engaging with Modernism

Even though many of the Whitney Museum's goals and its display style conflicted with Modernism, Whitney and Force were not simply opposed to Modernism nor suppressed by it. Whitney and Force engaged with Modernism, accepting the ideals of innovation, self-expression, and masculinity even as they rejected its denigration of the feminine and the domestic. As Rita Felski argues, women's emancipation struggles are interwoven with modernization; they cannot be unproblematically aligned with Modernism neither can they be placed outside of the discourse.⁶⁶ Whitney and Force's concern with living artists and

⁶³ Henry McBride, "Demuth Memorial Exhibition," *The New York Sun* (December 18, 1937) in *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride* ed. Daniel Catton Rich (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1975): 354-356.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Felski, 16.

exhibiting new talent coincides with Modernism's value of innovation.⁶⁷ Modernism both valued experimentation and the future through its repudiation of the past. The Whitney embraced this tenet, arguing its "chief concern will be with the present and the future"; proclaiming its ability to discover new talent; and vowing to "keep pace with every vital manifestation in contemporary American art."⁶⁸ However, this acceptance of new artistic forms did not cause the Museum to adopt a linear progression of art history like the Museum of Modern Art. Instead, the Whitney Museum continued to be inclusive, showing older artists with new styles in the same exhibition.⁶⁹

Whitney and Force also upheld a strong belief in self-expression, valuing the artist's experience as vital to his or her art. "We look to the artist to lead the way, permitting him the utmost liberty as to the direction in which he shall go."⁷⁰ Additionally, Whitney wrote "[t]here is no true art that does not come from the inside."⁷¹ However, Whitney and Force did not promote abstraction as the ultimate manifestation of selfhood. Their attraction to self-expression was probably linked to the opportunity it offered women artists and women in general. Even though perceptions of women's self-expression were often gendered as

⁶⁷ For further information on the valuation of innovation, see Nachoem M. Wijnberg and Gerda Gemser, "Adding Value to Innovation: Impressionism and the Transformation of the Selection System in Visual Arts," *Organization Science* 11, no. 3 (May-June 2000): 323-329. Wijnberg and Gemser argue that innovation became an important qualification for modern art, which impacted the visual arts critical system, bestowing power on the gallery and museum as experts.

⁶⁸ Hermon More, "Introduction," *Catalog of the Collections* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1931), 9-11.

⁶⁹ Lineker, 54.

⁷⁰ More, *Catalog of the Collection*, 11.

⁷¹ Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, "I believe in American Art," [ca. 1931], 3, Microfilm 2372, Whitney Museum of American Art, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers 1851-1975, SIAAA.

representing feminine characteristics and sexuality, Swinth argues that the idea of self-expression was actually very liberating.⁷² “Breaking with a restrictive aesthetic past seemed specifically meaningful to women, and female modernists equated aesthetic freedom with women’s liberation. In this sense, the embrace of modernism was the embrace of the potential for women.”⁷³

The drive for self-expression mirrored demands for female self-realization by the feminist movement and embodied by the New Woman. Feminism promoted women’s full development as an independent human being, not just as a wife and mother. Whitney embraced art as a way to express herself and achieve independence from her family. A career as an artist provided Whitney with her own goals and validated her existence: “I suddenly feel that I have power and I know that I am going to use it. I suddenly know that I am....now I am a person,” wrote Whitney after opening her own studio.⁷⁴ Both Whitney and Force embraced female actualization and suffrage, and they advocated by example women’s economic independence.

Furthermore, Whitney and Force engaged with Modernism by accepting the revitalization of art through an infusion of masculinity. Much of the art collected and displayed in the Whitney Museum of American Art contained and depicted masculine

⁷² Swinth, 169.

⁷³ Ibid, 179.

⁷⁴ B.H. Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney* (New York: DoubleDay and Co, 1978), 248; Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 1905 Diary, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Papers, Microfilm 1903, SIAAA.



Figure 3.3 Gifford Beal, *Fisherman*, 1928, Whitney museum of American Art.

content. For example, George Bellows' *Dempsey and Firpo*, Everett Shinn's *Revue*, Gifford Beal's *Fisherman*, Charles Demuth's *My Egypt*, and Gaston Lachaise's *Standing Woman* portrayed the virility promoted by Robert Henri.⁷⁵ The Bellows and Beal's art

works showed strong, muscular men

performing very masculine activities, such as boxing and boating.

Lachaise's sculpture depicts a nude voluptuous woman, and Shinn's *Revue* shows a stage performer; these images portray sexualized women in passive positions, suggesting the male artist or spectator's sexual domination.⁷⁶ The elevation of these art works suggest Whitney and Force's acceptance of the masculine subtext in Modernism. While Whitney and Force did not explicitly state masculinity as a good quality in art, they did express the importance

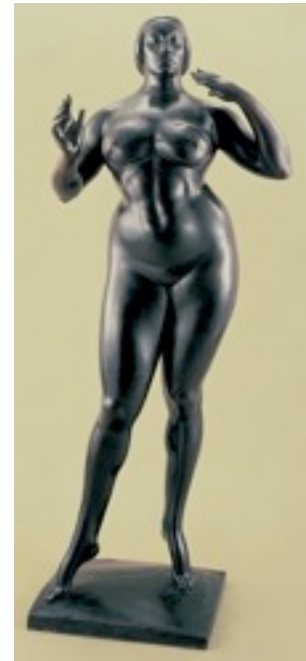


Figure 3.4 Gaston Lachaise, *Standing Woman*, 1912-1927, Whitney Museum of American

⁷⁵ For further analysis of Demuth's masculinity, see Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁷⁶ For a broader discussion of the portrayal of women in Modernist paintings, see Duncan, "Virility and Domination,"; and Pollock, "Modernity."

of “vitality,” “simplicity,” “sincerity,” and self-expression.⁷⁷ These were qualities identified with modern, masculine art in opposition to the perceived lifelessness, ornateness, and affectedness of Victorian art. By collecting and displaying modern art from male and female artists, Whitney and Force challenged perceived gender ideas that regulated women to a Victorian femininity.

Whitney and Force clearly advocated the need for a new vital art expressive of the American character, and yet they placed modern art in a feminized museum space. This placement might appear contradictory. As previously discussed, the domestic display was Whitney and Force’s challenge to formal, traditional museums like the Metropolitan, which they felt hindered appreciation of contemporary art by intimidating visitors. The realist nature of most of the art they exhibited may also have influenced the decor of the Whitney Museum. However, the display of highly masculine art in a domestic space was one powerful way for Whitney and Force to claim their right to participate in a male dominated art world as women.⁷⁸ With the renunciation of Victorian culture and its identification with femininity, women artists and patrons were pushed out of the art world. By creating their own museum, Whitney and Force were able to create their own professional opportunity; and

⁷⁷ More, *Catalog of the Collection*, 12; Whitney, “I believe.”

⁷⁸ Felski, 22. She discusses the way women often crossed perceived gender boundaries to question and thwart gender divides, yet this strategy does not mean women fully embraced phallogentrism, rather it shows the creation of contradictory, hybrid identities.

by designating the Museum as feminine, but displaying modern art, they worked to include themselves in definitions of the modern.⁷⁹

The Museum of Modern Art declares modern art a male endeavor. In contrast, the Whitney Museum embraced a modern feminine viewpoint. The Whitney moved away from “lifeless” Victorian culture, but did not abandon the feminine. Instead the Museum reworked femininity to be inclusive and energetic, capturing modern women’s political participation, new self realization, and sexual liberation. Several images

in the Whitney Museum’s collection connected to this modern femininity, showing women as sexual agents and participants in the public realm.⁸⁰ Examine for instance Guy Pène du Bois’ *Woman with Cigarette*, Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s *I’m Tired*, Sloan’s *Sixth Avenue Elevated at Third Street*, Peggy Bacon’s *The Whitney Studio Club*, and Raphael Soyer’s *Office Girls*, or paintings by Hopper, Isabel Bishop, Anne Goldthwaite, and Katherine



Figure 3.5 Guy Pène du Bois, *Woman with Cigarette*, 1929, Whitney Museum of American Art.

⁷⁹ Rudnick, 166; Doss, “Complicating Modernism,” 134. Rudnick and Doss discuss the ways women artists worked to include themselves in the modern. Doss argues that women often created their own organizations to participate in the art world.

⁸⁰ Scott and Rutkoff, 115-117. For an analysis of women Modernist artists, see Marian Wardle, ed. *American Women Modernist: the Legacy of Robert Henri 1910-1945* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

Schmidt. These images show women smoking, attending nude-life classes, and participating in the city's nightlife- all activities previously denied women.

Soyer's *Office Girls* depicts well dressed, professional looking women who are part of the new white collar workforce that was opening to educated women in the early twentieth century. One of the girls



assertively stares directly forward, engaging with the viewer; Soyer seems to be commenting on women's new independence.

Figure 3.6 Raphael Soyer, *Office Girls*, 1936, Whitney Museum of American Art.

Whitney and Force accepted certain key elements of Modernism, including innovation, self-expression, and masculinity. But they rejected Modernism's limited definition of the feminine and the devaluation of realism embedded in the Modernist art historical narrative; this negotiation allowed Whitney and Force to create a hybrid museum. The criticism of Whitney and Force's patronage and of the Whitney Museum, which tried to marginalize their influence, actually reveals their success in crossing gender boundaries to participate in a male dominated art world. Whitney and Force were able to form their own museum and influence the American art world despite gender dictates to remain in the home and Modernism's renunciation of the feminine. In the first half of the twentieth century, the

Whitney Museum's modern was able to co-exist with Modernism as represented by the Museum of Modern Art. However with the hegemony of the Modernist art historical narrative, the Whitney Museum's hybrid approach was labeled conservative and uncritical by critics like Greenberg, McBride, Talmey, and Watson.⁸¹ This narrative marginalized the Whitney Museum's influence and art collection.

Changes to the Whitney Museum

By 1945 being modern meant following the Modernist art historical narrative and exhibiting the New York School.⁸² After the death of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1942 and then Juliana Force in 1948, Directors Herman More (1948-1958) and Lloyd Goodrich (1958-1968) transformed the Museum's aesthetic in line with the Modernist art historical narrative even selling art work in the collection produced before 1900.⁸³ This change was further facilitated by the move of the Whitney Museum to West Fifty-Fourth Street in 1953 next to the Museum of Modern Art where the Whitney's new building was more modern with

⁸¹ Wolff, 488; Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*. Felski suggests that the gender of Modernism was more open ended in the early decades of the twentieth century; thus, Modernism could co-exist with realism as is exemplified by the contemporaneous founding of MoMA and the Whitney Museum.

⁸² Lineker, 23-24.

⁸³ Wolff, 487; Goodrich and Baur, 17.

less domestic signifiers.⁸⁴ In 1966, the Whitney Museum again moved to a new building, this one highly modern and conceived as a large scale sculpture designed by Marcel Breuer, a Modernist architect associated with the Bauhaus.⁸⁵ Although the Whitney Museum never fully relinquished realism, this move completely eliminated the Museum's early feminized space and cemented its adoption of the Modernist art historical narrative, consigning many realist artists to storage.⁸⁶



Figure 3.7 Whitney Museum of American Art, West Fifty-Fourth Street, ca. 1954

The Whitney Museum of American Art's position in relation to Modernism created juxtapositions, shaping the Museum's influence and collection. Whitney and Force created a complex, contradictory art institution that fused masculine and feminine, inclusivity and elitism, mass culture and high art, Modernism and conservatism, and abstraction and realism. Whitney and Force were able to create a museum with a modern feminine viewpoint by crossing gender boundaries and engaging with Modernism. They embraced Modernist values of innovation and self-expression and, yet, were loyal to realism. Whitney and Force staked their claim in the modern art world through the establishment of the Whitney Museum.

⁸⁴Lineker, 27; Goodrich and Baur, 17-18.

⁸⁵ Berman, *Rebels on*, 505.

⁸⁶ For a more detailed listing of which realists were marginalized, see Wolff, "Women at the Whitney."

The ascendancy of the Modernist art historical narrative effectively undermined the Whitney Museum's collection of realist art. The narrative identified realism with the kitsch and the feminine. Furthermore, the suppression of the feminine and its exclusion from Modernism served to undermine Whitney and Force's patronage and influence. Critics often dismissed the Museum as personal, feminine, conservative, and uncritical. Modernism also conflicted with the domestic nature of the Museum's display. The Museum of Modern Art, through its promotion of the Modernist art historical narrative and white cube display, contrasted sharply with the structure and appearance of the Whitney Museum. MoMA succeeded in the male dominated art world, while the Whitney Museum was marginalized. The transformation of the Whitney Museum to resemble the Museum of Modern Art in the 1960's, and the consignment of many realist artists to storage testifies to the hegemony of the Modernist art historical narrative. Not until the 1990's did realism begin to regain importance through retrospectives at the Whitney Museum of American Art, featuring Florine Stettheimer and Edward Hopper; and the exhibition, *Metropolitan Lives: the Ashcan Artists and Their New York*, at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. Art historians have also encouraged this revision, examining the ideology of Modernism and the Modernist art historical narrative to re-define and broaden the canon of modern art. Works, such as Erika Doss' *Twentieth-Century American Art*, Kirsten Swinth's, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art*, Wanda Corn's

The Great American Thing, and Daniel Joseph Singal's *Modernist Culture in America* have re-opened what it meant to be modern.⁸⁷

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force rebelled against gender and class ideology to pursue careers in the American art world. This rebellion contributed to their challenge of the citadels of the American art scene, the National Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and, ultimately, influenced Whitney and Force's creation of their own ideals about art museums. These ideals centered around democratization of the arts and included: the primacy of the individual artist, the promotion of American art, and the importance of an informal museum space. Furthermore, these ideals shaped the structure, policy, and decor of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Gender ideology worked as a double-edged sword, promoting Whitney and Force's foray into the art world, but coloring the perception of their actions by other art professionals and the media as charity and diminishing their authority.

The Whitney Museum was designed like a middle class American home in order to create an informal museum as part of Whitney and Force's goal to democratize the arts. They tried to balance the tension between inclusivity and the selectivity involved in museum collections. The structure of the Whitney Museum of American Art as private; the use of a domestic display style; and the policies associated with the biennial exhibitions led to critical perceptions of the Whitney Museum as personal, feminine, conservative, and uncritical.

⁸⁷ See Erika Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals*; Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing*; Daniel Joseph Singal ed., *Modernist Culture in America* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1991).

These perceptions combined with the Modernist discourse to hinder the Museum's institutional status and devalue the Museum's collection of realist art. Yet Whitney and Force always actively engaged with Modernism, the citadels of the American art scene, and conceptions of the feminine to create a complex museum space that was neither wholly feminine nor masculine, conservative nor innovative, public nor private, elitist nor inclusive.

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